

The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran

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Ervand Abrahamian

THE CAUSES OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION IN IRAN

The mode of production in material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, the social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production – or what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.

KARL MARX

Ideas were all-important for the individual whom they impelled into action; but the historian must attach equal importance to the circumstances that gave these ideas their chance. Revolutions are not made without ideas, but they are not made by the intellectuals. Steam is essential for driving a railway engine; but neither a locomotive nor a permanent way can be built out of steam.

CHRISTOPHER HILL

The writers furnished not only their ideas to the people who made the (French) revolution, but also their temperance and disposition. As the result of their long education, in the absence of any other instructors, coupled with their profound ignorance of practice, all Frenchmen from reading their books finally contracted the instincts, the turn of mind, the tastes and even the eccentricities natural to those who write. To such an extent was this the case that, when finally they had to act, they transported into politics all the habits of literature.

DE TOCQUEVILLE

THEORIES OF REVOLUTION

Marx, the prophet of revolution, may no longer haunt conservative politicians, but Marx, the theorist of revolution, continues to both attract and arouse social scientists. In the words of one student of politics, the social sciences, especially political sociology, can be described as a 'century-long dialogue with Karl Marx.'¹ And as one prominent historian of ideas has aptly stated, Marx can properly be called the midwife of twentieth-century social thought, 'for in the process of discarding what they had found invalid in Marxism and explaining

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank the Ali Banuazizi, James Bill, the late T. Cuyler Young, and Mangol Bayat Philipp for reading and commenting extensively on this paper. Of course, they are not responsible for any errors or opinions found in the paper.

¹ E. Nordlinger, ed. *Politics and Society: Comparative Political Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), p. 8.

what aspects of it had proved helpful, the innovators of the late nineteenth century took their first steps towards constructing a more general theory of social reality.² For example, Emile Durkheim developed the paradigm of 'mechanical and organic solidarity' to counter the theory of class struggle.³ Vilfred Pareto and Gaetano Mosca stressed the dichotomy between ruling elites and ruled masses to supplant the concept of socioeconomic classes.⁴ Robert Michels formulated the 'iron law of oligarchy' to warn that popular organizations, such as the Social Democratic Parties, would bring in not the era of democratic socialism but the autocracy of bureaucratic socialists.⁵ And Max Weber, of course, devoted much of his career to showing that the dynamics of class conflict should be studied concomitantly with the heavy weights of conservative ideologies, traditional religions, ethnic castes, and bureaucratic institutions.⁶

The recent revival of interest in theories of revolutions has rekindled the old dialogue between Marxists emphasizing the role of classes and non-Marxists stressing the importance of ideas, cultures, religions, and ideologies.⁷ Marx had argued that changes in the economic base of society created new forces, new interests, and new aspirations in the class structure of the same society. These social changes, in turn, undermined the political, institutional, and ideological superstructure controlled by the ruling class. As Engels eulogized at his friend's funeral, Marx's main contribution had been to prove that the superstructure of any society – especially the dominant values, laws, and organizations – were founded on the class structure, not vice versa as previous philosophers, particularly Hegel, had claimed.⁸ Thus according to Marx, revolutions were caused not by disruptions in the mode of perception but by innovations in the means of production; not by radical ideas but by revolutionary classes; not by 'outside agitators,' 'empty-headed propagandists,' and 'underground anarchists' – 'the magical alchemists of insurrection' – but by viable and broad social classes; and not by small groups of intellectuals but by major classes fighting for their own interests while 'inspiring' the masses with the dream of 'a new social order.'⁹

² S. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), p. 74.

³ E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor* (New York, 1964).

⁴ V. Pareto, *The Ming of Society* (London, 1935); G. Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York, 1939).

⁵ R. Michels, *Political Parties* (New York, 1949).

⁶ H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, eds, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1969).

⁷ For recent works on theories of revolution see: L. Stone, 'Theories of Revolution,' *World Politics*, 18, 2 (January 1966), 159–176; P. Zagorin, 'Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 88, 1 (March 1973), 3–26; L. Kaplan, ed. *Revolution: A Comparative Study* (New York, 1973); C. Welch and M. Taintor, ed. *Revolution and Political Change* (Los Angeles, 1972); C. Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Berkeley, 1968); special issue 'Revolution and Social Change,' *Comparative Politics*, 5, 3 (April 1973); special issue 'Theories of Revolution,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18, 2 (April 1976).

⁸ F. Engels, 'Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx,' *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1958), II, 167.

⁹ S. Padover, ed., *Karl Marx on Revolution* (New York, 1971), pp. 55, 422–424, 456–462.

Although Marx and Engels considered ideologies to be a part of the superstructure dependent upon the social structures, they did not deny the possibility that radical ideologists could, at times, develop into independent forces capable of helping undermine the ruling class. As Engels protested in his old age when young disciples tried to reduce all phenomena to economic explanations, Marx's 'guide to history' was designed to prove that the mode of production was the 'ultimate,' but not necessarily the 'only,' assertive force in social change:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle, constitutions, judicial forms, and reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, such as political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views, and systems of dogmas – all these exercise their influence on the course of historical struggles and in many cases predominate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements in which the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.¹⁰

The interaction between socioeconomic environment and ideological forces has become the focus of interest for a school of empirical Marxist historians in Britain. For example, Christopher Hill has devoted much of his work to the complex relationship between Puritanism and the middle class gentry in the English Revolution.¹¹ Edward Thompson has detailed the contribution of radical culture to the formation of working class consciousness in early industrial England.¹² George Rudé has investigated the role of popular values in early modern Europe in such public disturbances as bread riots, rural upheavals, and political demonstrations.¹³ Finally, Eric Hobsbawm has described how popular discontent expresses itself in different forms in agrarian, industrializing, and fully industrial societies.¹⁴ In his article 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography,' Hobsbawm has labeled as 'vulgar determinists' his fellow Marxists who fail to recognize the complex relationship between social structure and ideological superstructure.¹⁵

While Marxists trace ideology to social reality and radical ideas to discontented classes, non-Marxists – both behaviorists and structural-functionalists – usually use the framework developed first by de Toqueville who connected political

¹⁰ Engels to Bloch, *Selected Works*, II, 488.

¹¹ C. Hill: *Puritanism and Revolution* (New York, 1964); *Century of Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1961); *God's Englishman* (London, 1970).

¹² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

¹³ G. Rudé: *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964); *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (New York, 1967); co-authored with E. Hobsbawm, *Captain Swing* (New York, 1968).

¹⁴ E. Hobsbawm: *Labouring Men* (London, 1964); *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1959); *Bandits* (New York, 1971); *Revolutionaries* (New York, 1973).

¹⁵ E. Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography,' in R. Blackburn, ed., *Ideology in Social Sciences*, (London, 1972), pp. 265–288.

revolutions and social upheavals to intellectual innovations and cultural disruptions.¹⁶ For example, Talcott Parsons, the leading structural-functionalist, has argued that social systems are normally well integrated by their value systems, but occasionally lose internal equilibrium because of 'deviant,' 'disruptive,' 'dysfunctional,' and 'alienated' countercultures.¹⁷ Similarly, Ted Gurr, the main behaviorist who has examined the causes of rebellion, has formulated the argument that a widening gap between what individuals expect and what they receive produces 'relative deprivation'; 'relative deprivation' creates 'aggressive frustration'; 'aggressive frustration', in turn, develops a 'revolutionary mentality.'¹⁸

The aim of this essay is to apply the Marxist and the non-Marxist theories of revolution to the constitutional revolution of 1905–1907 in Iran. Although many historians – both inside and outside Iran – have examined the causes of the 1905–1907 upheavals, few have systematically tested these theoretical models. On the contrary, almost all have unsystematically – and often unknowingly – used an approach resembling that developed first by de Tocqueville. The classical Iranian historians of the constitutional movement – Ahmad Kasravi, Mehdi Malekzadeh, Yahyai Dawlatabadi, and Nizam al-Islam Kermani – have all argued that the modern ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, propagated by Westernized intellectuals, 'awakened' the 'sleeping public' at the end of the nineteenth century, and, thereby, led the way to the 'national resurgence' of the early twentieth century.¹⁹ The main contemporary historians in Iran – such as Fereyduun Adamiyat, 'Ali Shamim, Ibrahim Safa'i, and Hafez Farman Farmayan – have likewise stressed that the ideological foundations of traditional despotism were undermined by the introduction of the modern concepts of patriotism, secularism, and liberalism.²⁰ This Whig interpretation is typified by a recent popular history of the constitutional movement. Beginning with the premise 'the past proves that no force can prevent the triumph of liberty,' the author argues

¹⁶ M. Richter, 'Tocqueville's Contribution to the Theory of Revolutions,' in C. Friedrich, ed., *Revolutions* (New York, 1969).

¹⁷ T. Parsons, *The Social System* (New York, 1964), pp. 521–523.

¹⁸ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, 1971).

¹⁹ A. Kasravi, *Tarikh-i Mashrūteh-i Iran* (The History of the Iranian Constitution) (Tehran, 1961); M. Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The History of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran), Vol. I (Tehran, 1949); Y. Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahyai* (The Life of Yahyai), Vol. I (Tehran, 1957); Nizam al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-i Bidari-yi Iranian* (The History of the Iranian Awakening), Vol. I (Tehran, 1967).

²⁰ F. Adamiyat, *Fekr-i Azadi va Moqadimeh-yi Nahzat-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Concept of Liberty and the Beginnings of the Constitutional Movement in Iran) (Tehran, 1961); Adamiyat, *Andisheh-ha-yi Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani* (The Ideas of Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani) (Tehran, 1967); Adamiyat, *Fekr-i Demokrasi-yi Ijtima'yi va Nahzat-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Concept of Social Democracy and the Constitutional Movement in Iran) (Tehran, 1975); 'A. Shamim, *Iran dar Dawreh-i Saltanat-i Qajar* (Iran during the Qajar Dynasty) (Tehran, 1963); I. Safa'i, *Rahbaran-i Mashruteh* (The Leaders of the Constitution) (Tehran, 1963); H. Farman Farmayan, 'The Forces of Modernization in Nineteenth Century Iran,' in W. Polk and R. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 119–151.

that the arrival of Western concepts created an intellectual revolution, which, in turn, produced a sociopolitical revolution.²¹

The Western authorities on Iran have invariably used the same approach.²² For example, Edward Browne began his classic study on *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* with a description of how European political thought influenced Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani,' Mirza Malkum Khan, and other prominent reformers of late nineteenth-century Iran.²³ Sir Percy Sykes, in his *History of Persia*, traced the origins of the country's political 'awakening' to the establishment of printing presses, educational institutions, telegraph lines, foreign banks, and British consulates.²⁴ Donald Wilber, in *Iran: Past and Present*, has claimed that the 'political agitation' was 'rooted' in the contact of the younger educated intellectuals with the 'liberal thought of the West.'²⁵ Peter Avery, in his major work *Modern Iran*, while describing the general decline of the country at the turn of the century, has stressed the role of new ideas in the actual revolution.²⁶ Finally, Leonard Binder, the author of a rare study that applies sociological models – especially the structural–functional model – to the historical development of modern Iran, has argued that the introduction of Western concepts of legitimacy, particularly the principles of nationalism, secularism, and constitutionalism, generated the age of revolution in contemporary Iran.²⁷ Marx had intended to place Hegel 'on his feet' by showing that human consciousness was grounded in social existence. Binder, however, tried to turn Marx 'right side up' by arguing that ideological revolutions – not classes, interest groups, and other social groups – propel economic, political, and social revolutions.

This study tests the Marxist and the non-Marxist theories of revolution by assessing the relative importance of ideological innovation and sociological forces in the Iranian revolution. It compares the role of radical ideas with that of discontented classes; of modern concepts, beliefs, and value systems, with that of modern socioeconomic groups; of intellectuals – the carriers of new ideas – with that of major social interests; and of innovations in the mode of mental conception with that of disruptions in the mode of economic production and distribution.

The term 'revolution' requires an introductory explanation since it has

²¹ M. Razavani, *Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Constitutional Revolution in Iran) (Tehran, 1965), pp. 10–11.

²² For rare works that stress the economic causes of the revolution see N. Keddie: 'Iranian Politics, 1900–1905: Background to Revolution,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, 5, 1 (January 1969), 2–35; 'The Origins of the Religious–Radical Alliance in Iran,' *Past and Present*, 34 (July 1966), 70–80; J. Bill, *The Politics of Iran; Groups, Classes, and Modernization* (Columbus, 1972); M. Pavlovich and J. Iranski, *Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Constitutional Revolution of Iran), translated from Russian by Hushiyar (Tehran, 1961); B. Momeni, *Iran dar Astaneh-yi Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat* (Iran on the Eve of the Constitutional Revolution) (Tehran, 1966).

²³ E. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (London, 1910).

²⁴ P. Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London, 1963), II, 395–397.

²⁵ D. Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present* (Princeton, 1955), p. 81.

²⁶ P. Avery, *Modern Iran* (London, 1965), pp. 106–139.

²⁷ L. Binder, *Iran: Political Development in a Changing Society* (Berkeley, 1963).

become a sponge word soaking up such diverse phenomena as peasant revolts, army rebellions, government dictated reforms, scientific innovations, industrial transformations, hair style variations, and, of course, annual alterations in car designs. Moreover, Ann Lambton has argued that the constitutional revolution in Iran cannot be described as a true revolution because its participants wanted to reform the traditional society rather than establish a modern system of government.²⁸ I use the term 'revolution' to mean a sharp, sudden, and often violent change in the social location of political power, expressing itself in the radical transformation of the regime, of the official foundation of legitimacy, and of the state conception of the social order.²⁹ The adjectives 'sharp,' 'sudden,' and 'violent' are used to differentiate revolutions both from gradual transformations obtained by forces outside the government and from peaceful reforms initiated by innovators inside the government. Change in the social location of political power means the ruling positions at the state center change hands either from one class to another class or from one group to a significantly different social group. Regime means the state system of government – despotic monarchy, limited monarchy, parliamentary democracy, parliamentary oligarchy. Official foundation of legitimacy means the regime's method for claiming sovereignty, establishing legality, and converting revolutionary power into acceptable authority. State conception of the social order means the regime's perception of what is a healthy society, what should be the role of the government in such a society, and what were the causes of decline under the previous regime.

Using this definition, the constitutional revolution of Iran was indeed a true revolution. It was sharp, sudden, and violent – especially in the provinces during the subsequent two years of civil war. The bloody civil war is not discussed in this paper because of the shortage of space. More important, the constitutional revolution caused an immediate shift in the social location of power from the royal court ruled by the Qajar Shahs to a national parliament dominated initially by the urban middle classes. Moreover, the Qajars never succeeded in reestablishing their despotism, even though the revolutionary movement in later years, particularly in the 1910s, weakened because of internal contradictions, foreign interventions, and tribal insurrections. Furthermore, what emerged in the 1920s was not a reestablishment of the old despotism but the establishment of a new absolutism armed with such modern coercive institutions as a standing army and a statewide bureaucracy. Reza Shah Pahlevi differed from the Qajars as much as Napoleon differed from the Bourbons and Cromwell differed from the early Stuarts. The constitutional revolution also caused radical transformations in the system of government – from a despotic monarchy to parliamentary monarchy; in the official foundations of legitimacy – from the claims of Shadows of God on Earth and the Divine Rights of Kings to the sovereignty of the People

²⁸ A. Lambton, 'The Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–6,' in P. Vatikiotis, ed., *Revolutions in the Middle East* (London, 1972), pp. 173–182.

²⁹ For an elaboration of this definition see E. Kamenka, 'The Concept of Political Revolution,' in Friedrich, ed., *Revolutions*, pp. 122–135.

(*millat*) as well as the inalienable Rights of Man and of Private Property; and in the official conception of the social order – from an hierarchical and patrimonial system to a supposedly democratic and egalitarian system where all Muslims, irrespective of birth, enjoyed in theory open access to positions of authority. Finally, the constitutional revolution was a true revolution in that it introduced a new regime rather than rebuilt the old regime. Of course, many of the participants denied that they intended to introduce a new order, and sincerely believed that they were revitalizing and reforming the old order. But, in the same way as the French Convention draped itself as the Roman Republic and the English Puritans considered themselves as free Anglo-Saxons overthrowing the Norman Yoke, so the Iranian revolutionaries thought that they were returning to ancient traditions whereas, in fact, they were introducing something new and unknown in their society – a statewide political movement that demanded an elected National Assembly to limit the authority of the traditional Shah-an-Shahs. They frequently referred to the teachings of Imams ‘Ali, Hussein, and Hassan; but not a single one of these Shi‘i Imams had ever spoken of elected National Assemblies. In the words of Marx:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when men seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.³⁰

EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRAN

Social scientists have used the term ‘class’ in at least two different ways: first, as a sociological category to rank individuals with similar sources of income, similar degrees of influence, and similar styles of life; second, as a sociopsychological term to classify individuals who share not only parallel positions in the social hierarchy, but also similar economic, cultural, and political attitudes. Marx described the first as a class ‘in itself’ but not yet ‘for itself’; the second as a class ‘for itself’ as well as ‘in itself.’³¹ Similarly, modern sociologists have contrasted socioeconomic, latent, and objective classes with sociopolitical, manifest, and subjective classes.³² Classes in the former sense of the word obviously exist, to various degrees, in all societies; but classes in the latter sense of the word do not necessarily exist in all societies.

In early nineteenth-century Iran, classes existed in the first, but not in the second, meaning of the term.³³ The population, which totaled no more than five

³⁰ K. Marx, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,’ *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1958), I, 247.

³¹ K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1920), pp. 188–189.

³² S. Ossowski, *Class Structure in Social Consciousness* (London, 1963), pp. 69–87; R. Centers, *The Psychology of Social Class* (Princeton, 1949), pp. 21–27.

³³ For a description of the class structure in nineteenth-century Iran see E. Abrahamian,

million in the 1850s, can be categorized into four major classes (*tābaqat*). The first, the landed upper class, consisted of a central elite and many local elites. The central elite included the Qajar dynasty, the royal princes (*shāhzādegān*), the influential courtiers (*darbārīs*), the large fief-holders (*tuyūldārs*), the hereditary accountants (*mustawfīs*), the royal ministers (*vazīrs*), the princely governors (*farmānfarmās*), and the titled state officials – the al-Saltanehs (Pillars of the Monarch), al-Mulks (Victors of the Kingdom), al-Dawlehs (Aides of the State), and al-Mamāleks (Strengths of the Empire). The local elites comprised the regional notables (*a'yāns*), the provincial noblemen (*ashrāfs*), the tribal chiefs (*khāns*), and the hereditary, titled, and invariably propertied, administrators (*mīrzās*). Closely tied to the landed upper class were the few state-appointed religious officials: the *qāzīs* presiding over the state courts; the *imām jum'ehs* in charge of the Friday Mosques in the major cities; and the *shaykh al-islāms* regulating the main religious courts. The central and provincial elites later became known as the aristocracy (*aristukrāsī*), the magnates (*bozorgān*), the power circles (*hayāt-i hākemeh*), and the 'feudal' landed class (*tabaqeh-i malūk-i al-tavā'if*).

The second major class, the propertied middle class, included urban merchants (*tujjār*), small landowners (*malek*), as well as bazaar shopkeepers and workshop owners (*pishevarān*). Since businessmen, tradesmen, and craftsmen financed the bazaar mosques, schools (*maktabs*), seminaries (*madresehs*), theaters (*takiyas*), and other religious foundations (*vaqfs*), the propertied middle class was intricately connected to the clergy ('*ulamā'*) – to the various preachers (*vā'ez*), Koranic teachers (*ākhunds*), seminary students (*tullābs*), low-ranking clerics (*mullas*), and even high-ranking theologians (*mujtaheds*). Moreover, some members of the bazaar population claimed to be descendants of the prophet (*sayyids*).

The third class was formed of urban wage-earners, such as hired artisans, apprentices, journeymen, household servants, porters, laborers, and building workers. Finally, the fourth major class consisted of the vast majority of the rural population (*ri'yat*) – the tribal masses (*ilīyātī*) as well as the landless and near landless peasantry (*dehqānān*).

These four, however, were only latent, objective, and sociological classes. They failed to develop into manifest, subjective, and sociopsychological classes because of the predominance of local communal ties based on tribal lineages, religious sects, linguistic sentiments, and paternalistic affiliations. Cutting through the socioeconomic lines, the communal ties fragmented the horizontal strata, strengthened the vertical bonds, and, thereby, hindered the development of self-conscious sociopolitical classes. To paraphrase Marx, insofar as numerous individuals shared similar ways of life, similar positions in the mode of production, and similar relations to the means of administration, they constituted socioeconomic classes. But insofar as these individuals were bound by local ties,

failed to overcome regional barriers, and articulated no statewide interests, they did not constitute independent sociopolitical classes.

The communal divisions found their origins mainly in the geography of Iran. A marked shortage of rainfall, a general lack of navigable rivers and lakes, a vast central plateau, and four formidable mountain ranges combined to make travel arduous and communications difficult. Thus geography tended to fragment the population into small local communities – into isolated villages, small towns, and nomadic tribes. The peasantry, totaling over 60 percent of the country, lived in some 10,000 small villages. The urban population, constituting less than 25 percent of the country, resided in some ten cities and seventy towns. And the nomads, numbering as much as 15 percent of the total country, were grouped into sixteen major federations, each federation segmented into numerous tribes, subtribes, and migratory camps.

Communal divisions were reflected in, as well as reinforced by, relative economic isolation. Until the growth of trade in the latter part of the century, many regions were predominantly self-sufficient, producing and consuming much of their agricultural and handicraft needs.³⁴ The modest trade that did exist was limited mostly to luxury goods either en route to foreign markets or to one of the few large urban centers. Moreover, this modest trade was invariably restricted by slow and unreliable roads – by rugged terrain, long distances, natural disasters, government neglect, and such social disruptions as rural banditry and tribal uprisings. For example, the highway between the southern port of Khorramshahr and Tehran was so slow that it was quicker to travel from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea by boat, from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea by land, from Baku to Enzeli (Pahlevi) but boat again, and finally from Enzeli to Tehran by land again. This general lack of communications created periodic crises, in which one region could be suffering from dire famine while another was enjoying a plentiful harvest.

The geographical barriers were compounded often by linguistic differences. Persians, Bakhtiyārīs, Qashqāyīs, Arabs, and Lurs lived in the Central Plateau. Small groups of Baluchīs, Afshārs, and Arabs were scattered in the southeastern deserts. Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Afshārs, and Mamesenīs inhabited the western mountains. Āzerīs, Shāhsavans, Kurds, together with scattered settlements of Armenians and Assyrians, lived in the northeastern districts. Gilakīs, Tāleshīs, and Māzandarānīs populated the Caspian provinces. Finally, Persians, Turkomans, Kurds, Shāhsavans, Afshārs, Tīmurs, Baluchīs, Tājiks, and Jamshīds resided in the northeastern regions. Iran, thus, was a land of linguistic diversity.

Social barriers were complicated by religious cleavages, which in some areas reinforced existing communal differences, while in others they caused new ones. The country's population was obviously divided into a Shi'i majority, a Sunni minority formed of Kurds, Turkomans, Arabs, and Baluchīs, and a non-

³⁴ F. Khamsi, 'The Development of Capitalism in Rural Iran,' unpublished M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1968.

Muslim population of Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The Shi'ī majority, however, was itself divided into various sects, orders, and religious schools. Some districts were polarized into the Ni'matī and Ḥaydarī factions; others into the orthodox Twelver Mujtahedīs and the unorthodox Isma'īlīs, Karīmkhānīs, and Shaykhīs. These religious communities invariably segregated themselves into their own town wards (*mahallāt*). For example, Shiraz was formed of five eastern Ḥaydarī wards, five western Ni'matī wards, and one suburban Jewish ward.³⁵ Tabriz – the largest city in 1850 with a population of 100,000 – included thirteen separate *mahallāt*: an aristocratic suburb; six agricultural districts farmed by Mujtahedī Twelvers who were known locally as Mutashar'īs; an Armenian quarter; three central wards of Khīābān, Nubar, and Amīr Khīzī inhabited by Shaykhī merchants, traders, and craftsmen; and two northern slums of Davachī and Sarkhāb crowded with Mutashar'ī laborers, porters, peddlers, dyers, and carpet weavers.³⁶

These communal barriers were further reinforced by social organizations. Each tribe, each village, each town ward, had its own separate and hierarchical structure. At the apex were the landed magnates – the tribal chiefs, and major fiefholders, and the urban notables. At the base were the common people – the peasants, the nomads, and the town inhabitants. In between were layers of intermediaries, the most important of whom, throughout the country, were the village, tribal, ward, and guild, *kadkhudās* (headmen). These *kadkhudās*, drawn invariably from the medium-incomed families, were often elected to their posts by the local communities. As headmen, they carried out two major functions: they mediated disputes between members of their own community; and they represented their own community in its dealings with the outside world – whether with the state, especially in the collection of taxes, or with the neighboring communities, particularly in the periodic disputes over adjacent lands, water rights, and tax assessments. Because of these frequent disputes, *kadkhudās* and influential landowners acted as patrons, defending their own community against other communities. The essence of this patriarchal system was summed up by an old Persian proverb, 'A man without a protector is like a dog howling in the wilderness.'

These communal divisions, by fragmenting the population into small self-contained units, not only prevented the development of social classes but also permitted the Qajar shahs to dominate the country in the manner of typical 'oriental despots.' In the words of an observant European visitor, the monarchs 'ensured their own safety' by continually 'fomenting' and 'nicely balancing the existing mutual jealousies.'³⁷ As Ann Lambton has appropriately stated, the ruling kings systematically manipulated the 'constitutional inability' of the landlords to combine and adopted the 'perpetuation of tribal feuds' as 'instru-

³⁵ H. Busse, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule* (New York, 1972).

³⁶ E. Abrahamian, 'The Crowd in the Persian Revolution,' *Iranian Studies*, 2, 4 (Autumn 1969), 128–150.

³⁷ J. Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London, 1813), p. 45.

ments of state policy.³⁸ Moreover, they consciously exploited the sectarian conflicts in the towns to weaken potential challenges from the urban populations. As one British traveler remarked, Iranian cities, unlike medieval European cities, were so sharply factionalized into rival wards that they were incapable of resisting the central government.³⁹ To paraphrase Marx, the Qajar 'despots' manipulated the small communities – 'the little stereotype of social organisms' – and, thus, 'stood over,' 'poised above,' and 'symbolized' the unity of all the lesser communities:

The despot here appears as the father of all the numerous lesser communities, thus realizing the common unity of all. It therefore follows that the surplus product belongs to this highest unity. Oriental despotism therefore appears to lead to a legal absence of property. In fact, however, its foundation is tribal or common property, in most cases created through a combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community which thus becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus production.⁴⁰

THE IMPACT OF THE WEST

The impact of the West undermined the fragile relationship between the Qajar state and the Iranian society. A series of military defeats suffered in two Russo-Iranian wars and three Anglo-Iranian wars ended with the Treaties of Turkmanchai (1827) and Paris (1857). These treaties exacted, in addition to territorial concessions, harsh commercial capitulations that lowered import duties, permitted Britain and Russia to open trading agencies anywhere within Iran, and exempted their merchants from local laws, tariffs, and road tolls. These capitulations, in coinciding with the Industrial Revolution in Europe, opened the way for the dramatic influx of mass-manufactured goods into Iran. During the century, the volume of foreign trade grew in real terms by as much as ten times.⁴¹ This growth of foreign trade, in turn, caused, on one hand, the destruction of many handcraft industries, such as textiles, and, on the other hand, the construction of modern communications, the commercialization of agriculture, especially in the Caspian provinces, and the expansion of export-oriented industries, especially handwoven carpets. In short, the incorporation of Iran into the European world-system transformed the precapitalist economy, with its production for use-value, into a market economy, with its production for sale-value.⁴² As Marx stated, the cheap price of industrial commodities was the 'heavy artillery' with which Western capitalists 'battered down' all 'Chinese walls' in the non-Western world.⁴³

³⁸ A. Lambton, 'Persian Society under the Qajars,' *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 48, 4 (July–October 1961), 130.

³⁹ J. Malcolm, *History of Persia* (London, 1829), II, 429.

⁴⁰ K. Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, ed. E. Hobsbawm (London, 1964), p. 70.

⁴¹ C. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago, 1971), p. 132.

⁴² The term 'European world-system' is borrowed from I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York, 1974).

⁴³ K. Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto,' *Selected Works*, I, 38.

The impact, moreover, propelled a sharp rise in the prices of basic commodities. The incorporation of Iran into the international market, by coinciding with a worldwide fall in the price of silver, caused a drastic decline in the value of the country's silver currency. This undermined public confidence in the coinage and inflated the cost of imported products. Furthermore, the imposition of border controls against epidemics, the construction of roads into famine-infested regions, and the introduction of modern medicine into the cities, all contributed toward doubling the population from five million in 1850 to nearly ten million in 1900. This intensified the demand for food and, thus, stimulated a further rise in the price of essential commodities.⁴⁴

The Qajars, at first, responded to the Western challenge by initiating ambitious programs for military, administrative, and economic reforms.⁴⁵ But failing to mobilize sufficient financial resources and arousing the opposition of the provincial elites who felt threatened by the formation of a strong centralized state, the later Qajars – especially Naser al-Din Shah (1848–1896) – limited themselves to less ambitious reforms. Many of these reforms collaborated with rather than challenged the West; strengthened their state vis-à-vis the society rather than their society vis-à-vis the foreign states; and carried out piecemeal court-based rather than wholesale statewide modernization. The long reign of Naser al-Din Shah saw the establishment of a small Cossack brigade and a municipal police force; the reorganization of the informal court administration into a slightly more formal government cabinet with state ministers – but not yet with large-scale ministries; the introduction of electricity plants for the main cities; the opening of the first railway, connecting Tehran to the shrine of Shah 'Abdul 'Azim a few miles away; and the founding of a central mint to replace the thirty-one regional mints. The reign also saw the introduction of the first state newspaper, scientific journal, translation office, military academy, and modern high school – the Dar al-Funūn (Abode of Learning). The Dar al-Funūn, which admitted every year some 250 students, mostly from the sons of the upper class, offered secular subjects such as foreign languages, political science, engineering mineralogy, military sciences, medicine, and veterinary medicine. Over forty of the early graduates were sent to Europe to complete their studies.

The Dar al-Funūn, together with the translation office and an older publishing house in Tabriz, in the course of the century printed over 160 books. They included 88 textbooks on military subjects, scientific matters, medicine, and European languages, 13 works on Persian literature, 4 biographies of famous

⁴⁴ Many nineteenth-century observers claimed that the inflation was caused by Qajar debasements of the silver coinage. But the debasements corresponded with the inflation in neither time nor degree. The coinage dilution of 50 percent hardly paced the price inflation of nearly 600 percent. And the debasements occurred mostly in the first half of the century, although food prices rose sharply in the second half of the century. For the statistics see Issawi, *Economic History of Iran*, pp. 339–390.

⁴⁵ For the early attempts at modernization see F. Adamiyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran* (Amir Kabir and Iran) (Tehran, 1969); J. Lorentz, 'Modernization and Political Change in Nineteenth-Century Iran,' unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1974.

figures in Islam, 10 travelogues about the West, including Naser al-Din Shah's own account of his European tour, 10 translations of classics from European literature, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Dumas's *Three Musketeers*, and Molière's plays, and 10 histories of Iran, including John Malcolm's famous *History of Persia*. Thus Iranians began to see their own history through the eyes of nineteenth-century Europeans. Finally, they published over 20 translations of European works on Western history – studies on Rome, Athens, France, Germany, Russia, and Britain, as well as biographies on Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, Charles the Great of Sweden, Louis XIV, Napoleon, and Frederick the Great of Prussia.

To pay for the modest reforms and to alleviate the deep cuts made into the court revenues by the sharp inflation, Naser al-Din Shah increasingly resorted to the sale of offices, titles, state lands, tax-farms, and, most important of all, economic privileges to foreign governments and concession-hunters. Baron de Reuter, a British citizen, bought rights to build railroads and search for minerals. Lynch Brothers, a British company, gained control over shipping in the Karun river. The Imperial Bank of Persia, also a British concern, purchased the monopoly to print banknotes and the privilege to collect tolls on southern roads. Meanwhile, a Russian company, the Cie. de la Route, won contracts to pave highways in the north and to dredge the port of Enzeli. Another Russian company obtained a monopoly over the fishing industry in the Caspian. And yet another, a monopoly over the insurance of transport on the northern roads. Moreover, European entrepreneurs invested more limited sums of capital in small ventures, such as in shipping on Lake Urmi'eh (Reza'ieh), carpet weaving in Sultanabad (Arak), cotton growing in Khurasan, and opium cultivation in Kerman. Thus foreign investments increased in the latter part of the century from almost nothing to over £12,000,000. Iran had been opened to European capital as well as to European commerce.

The Western challenge and the Qajar response created two significant structural changes within Iranian society. On the one hand, the influx of mass-manufactured goods, the commercialization of agriculture, the introduction of modern communications (especially the telegraph), and the sale of monopolies to foreign concession-hunters coalesced the many regional bazaars into a cross-regional middle class conscious for the first time of its state-wide interests and its foreign competitors. The bourgeoisie became a sociopsychological class as well as a socioeconomic class, a class 'for itself' as well as 'in itself.' On the other hand, the opening of secular educational institutions, the expansion of the central administration, and the training of new civil servants, army officers, and technical professionals, created a small but vital salaried middle class. This class later became known as the modern intelligentsia (*munaver al-fekr*).

THE BOURGEOISIE

The local bazaars were transformed into a national middle class in a number of

ways. First, the integration of the regional markets into a national market and the national market into the international market dissolved the relatively self-sufficient units into one major statewide economic unit. Second, the introduction of modern communications bridged the geographical distances, and, thereby, brought the various urban centers closer together. Third, the beginnings of a modern state, especially the establishment of a central mint, of government newspapers, and of a cabinet system, focused the attention of the provincial towns onto the national capital. Fourth, the influx of mass-manufactured products undermined the traditional handicrafts, and, consequently, presented for the different bazaars a mutual enemy, the foreign competitor. As one tax collector reported in a detailed study of the commercial crisis in Isfahan:

In the past, good-quality textiles were manufactured in Isfahan since everyone – from the highest to the lowest – wore local products. But in the last few years, the people have given up their body and soul to buy the colorful and low-quality, but cheap, products of Europe. In doing so, they have incurred greater losses than they imagined: local weavers, in imitating foreign fabrics, have lowered their quality; Russians have stopped buying Iranian textiles; and many occupations have suffered great losses. At least one-tenth of the guilds in this city were weavers; not even one-fifth has survived. About one-twentieth of the needy widows lived by spinning for the weavers. They have now lost their only source of livelihood. Likewise, other important guilds, such as dyers, carders, and bleachers, have suffered.⁴⁶

Fifth, the inflow of foreign capital created a small comprador bourgeoisie, but, at the same time, antagonized the majority of the national bourgeoisie. Although the latter invariably viewed the former as an alien non-Muslim element, a detailed British 'Who's Who' of Iran in 1897 shows that of the fifty-three wealthy businessmen in the country only six were non-Muslims.⁴⁷ Finally, the Qajar response – or rather, the lack of an effective response to the foreign threat – intensified the opposition of the national bourgeoisie to the central government.

Many of the problems facing the propertied middle class can be seen in a report sent to Naser al-Din Shah in 1882 by a government official from the port of Bushire on the Persian Gulf.⁴⁸ Having describe the recent growth of Bushire, the official explained that the boom had not benefited the Iranian merchants because, unlike their British competitors, they were handicapped by government neglect, by lack of storage depots and modern steamboats, and by higher taxes, import duties, and road tolls. The report warned that the local merchants had the choice of either going bankrupt or buying British citizenship. On the back of the report, Naser al-Din Shah criticized the merchants for their 'selfishness' and praised the official for his 'interesting observation,' but failed typically to initiate any government remedies.

⁴⁶ Mirza Hussein Khan Tahvildar-i Isfahan, *Jukhrafia-yi Isfahan* (The Geography of Isfahan) (Tehran, 1963), pp. 100–101.

⁴⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel Picot, 'Persia: Biographical Notices,' F.O. 881/Persia 1897/7028.

⁴⁸ Mirza Taqi Khan Hakimbashi, 'Reports on Bushire,' *Esnad-i Nowuafteh* (Recently Found Documents), ed. I. Safa'i (Tehran, 1970), pp. 104–115.

The Qajar failure widened the already wide gulf that existed between the ruling dynasty and the urban population, for the political culture of traditional Iran was formed of two contradictory themes. The ancient, pre-Islamic, culture glorified the Shah-an-Shahs as the all-powerful Shadows of God on Earth endowed with the divine responsibility of protecting their subjects from external dangers and distributing 'justice' among the social orders.⁴⁹ As the 'Mirror for Princes' literature invariably stressed, the monarch's main duty was to preserve a 'just' balance between the 'men of the pen,' 'men of the sword,' 'men of trade,' and 'men of agriculture.'⁵⁰ The dominant Shi'i culture, however, viewed the monarch as a worldly usurper of a religious authority that had been temporarily delegated by the Hidden Imam, the Mahdī, to the leading *mujtaheds*. As one modern historian has aptly observed, 'the Shi'i state is a contradiction in terms.'⁵¹ Thus by failing to protect their subjects and balance the social orders, the Qajars further weakened their weak ideological legitimacy in the eyes of the urban middle class.

THE INTELLIGENTSIA

The Qajars built new institutions to strengthen their position. But the same institutions, by creating a modern intelligentsia with new interests, concepts, and aspirations, ultimately undermined the Qajars. In describing themselves as the 'enlightened thinkers' (*munaver al-fekr*), the intelligentsia revealed much about themselves. Exposure to the ideas of the West, especially the ideas of the French Enlightenment, persuaded them that history was the March of Human Progress, not the revelation of God's Will as the Muslim '*ulamā*' believed, nor the cyclic rise and fall of royal dynasties such as court chroniclers narrated. Western history further convinced them that Human Progress was not only desirable but also attainable, provided mankind broke the three chains of royal despotism, clerical dogmatism, and foreign imperialism. They viewed the first as the political enemy of liberty, equality, and the pursuit of social progress; the second as the ideological opponent of rational-scientific knowledge ('*ilm-i jadīd*'); and the third as the economic exploiter of weak states, such as their own.

The intelligentsia, therefore, came to see constitutionalism, secularism, and nationalism as the three vital means for attaining the establishment of a modern, strong, and developed Iran. These three objectives, although aimed at the same final goal, often produced shifts in immediate tactics. The intelligentsia found itself, at times, allied with the Shah against the '*ulamā*'; at times, with the '*ulamā*' against the Shah; at other times, with the Shah against the imperial powers; and at yet other times, as in the constitutional revolution, with the '*ulamā*' against both the Shah and the imperial powers. These tactical inconsistencies, as well as

⁴⁹ R. Frye, 'The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran,' *Iranica Antiqua*, 4 (1964), 36-54.

⁵⁰ A. Lambton, 'Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship,' *Studia Islamica*, 17 (1957), 91-119.

⁵¹ H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 57.

the general consistencies, can be seen in the life and work of Mirza Malkum Khan, one of the leading figures of the first-generation intelligentsia.

Malkum Khan was born of Armenian parentage in 1833 in the Christian quarter of New Julfa outside Isfahan.⁵² His father, who had studied in India, taught French and English at the royal court. An enthusiastic admirer of the West, he sent Malkum Khan on a state scholarship to France to study engineering. While in Paris, Malkum Khan developed a keen interest in Freemasonry and political philosophy, especially in Saint Simon's school of social engineering and Auguste Comte's new Religion of Humanity. Returning to Iran, he joined the faculty of the Dar al-Funūn, impressed Naser al-Din Shah with his scientific experiments, converted to Islam (probably to further his public career), and formed a secret society named the Farāmūshkhāneh (House of Oblivion) which was modeled on, but not attached to, European masonic lodges.

Winning the attention of the Shah, Malkum Khan drafted for the court a *Daftar-i Tanzimat* (Book of Reform). Inspired obviously by the contemporary Tanzimat movement in the Ottoman Empire, the *Daftar* was one of the first systematic proposals for reform written in modern Iran. It began with a general warning that the country would soon be engulfed by the foreign powers unless the Shah immediately decreed new laws for reform. Malkum Khan used the term *qānūn* for these laws, to differentiate them from both the religious laws (*shari'ah*) and the existing state laws ('*urf*'). These new laws, Malkum Khan stressed, must be based on two fundamental principles: the improvement of public welfare and the equality of all citizens. The book then concluded with a list of specific recommendations: the separation of the government into a legislative council and an executive cabinet, both to be appointed by the Shah; the acceptance of public opinion; the codification of the previous laws; the formation of a professional army; the creation of an independent tax department; the introduction of a comprehensive educational system; the building of new highways between the main towns; and the establishment of a state bank to finance economic development.

Naser al-Din Shah at first listened to the proposals and even considered accepting the post of grandmaster in the Farāmūshkhāneh. But once the religious authorities in Tehran denounced the concept of *qānūn* as a 'heretical innovation' (*bi'da*) and accused the Farāmūshkhāneh of having connections with the 'atheistic republican' freemasons in Europe, Naser al-Din Shah banned the society, shelved the *Daftar-i Tanzimat*, and exiled Malkum Khan to the Ottoman Empire.⁵³

It was probably during this period of exile that Malkum Khan wrote his satirical work on the traditional literati entitled *A Traveller's Tale*. In this work,

⁵² For detailed biographies see Adamiyat, *Fekr-i Azadi*, pp. 100–120; H. Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* (Berkeley, 1973).

⁵³ I. Ra'in, *Faramushkhaneh va Fremasunri dar Iran* (The House of Oblivion and Freemasonry in Iran) (Tehran 1968) I, 525. The religious authorities also spread rumors that the Farāmūshkhāneh was organizing sex orgies for the 'beardless youth of the Dar al-Funūn.'

he parodied, on one hand, the court intellectuals, scribes, and poets for their obscure language, meaningless phraseology, obsession with trivia, and flattery of the powerful; and, on the other hand, the religious authorities for their pomposity, ignorance, intolerance, distrust of modern science, use of incomprehensible Arabic, resort to esoteric mumbo jumbo, enflaming of sectarian passions, and financial exploitation of the faithful community. In addition to being one of the very first anticlerical satires to be circulated in Iran, *A Traveller's Tale* was also among the first literary works to be written in clear Persian prose free of the traditional ornamental phraseology.

While in exile in Istanbul, Malkum Khan befriended Mirza Hussein Khan, the liberal-inclined ambassador from Iran, and obtained, through him, the post of consul-general in Cairo. The years of exile, however, ended in 1871, when Naser al-Din Shah, again toying with the possibility of reform, appointed Hussein Khan chief minister and named Malkum Khan special adviser with the title of Nizam al-Mulk (Regulator of the Realm). But no sooner had the new government cut the court budget, divided the administration into an executive cabinet and an advisory legislative council, and raised funds with the sale of the Reuter concession than it was confronted by an aristocratic and clerical reaction. Whereas Hussein Khan was dismissed, Malkum Khan was sent off to London as the new Western-educated ambassador.

As ambassador in London, Malkum Khan continued to petition the Shah for reforms, established contact with the exiled 'al-Afghani,' and encouraged his colleagues in Tehran to seek further administrative improvements. Malkum Khan, however, turned more radical after 1889, as soon as he lost his ambassadorship as a result of selling a nonexistent gambling monopoly to a group of British concession-hunters and refusing to share the spoils with courtiers in Tehran. His dismissal changed Malkum Khan from an insider petitioning reform into an outsider advocating revolution; from a mild liberal seeking the protection of the Shah against the '*ulamā*' into an outspoken radical allying with the '*ulamā*' against the Shah; and from a royal administrator drafting proposals into a radical journalist presenting the ideas of modern Europe, especially Saint Simon's positivism and Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity, in forms acceptable to traditional Iran. In a public lecture 'Persian Civilization' delivered in London soon after his dismissal, Malkum Khan admitted that his main intention was to make the political philosophy of the West acceptable by clothing it in the terminology of the Koran, the Hadiths, and the Shi'i Imams.⁵⁴ Posing the question why Iran was backward, he rejected the conventional European explanations based on race and religion. Instead, he blamed political despotism and cultural insularity. To overcome the former, he advocated laws protecting life, liberty, and property; for without these three, there could be no security, and without security, there could be no progress. To overcome the

⁵⁴ Malcom Khan, 'Persian Civilization,' *Contemporary Review*, 54 (February 1891), 238-244.

latter, he proposed the introduction of modern concepts in terms palatable to conventional Islam:

We have found that ideas which were by no means acceptable when coming from your agents in Europe were accepted at once with greatest delight when it was proved that they were latent in Islam. I can assure you that the little progress which you see in Persia and Turkey, especially in Persia, is due to this fact that some people have taken your European principles and instead of saying that they came from England, France, or Germany, they have said, 'We have nothing to do with Europeans; but these are the true principles of our religion (and indeed, this is quite true) which have been *taken by Europeans!*' That has had a marvelous effect at once.

Malkum Khan, moreover, founded the famous newspaper *Qānūn* in order to carry his views from London to Iran. Although the paper was a sporadic, one-man enterprise, it aroused considerable interest in Tehran: so much so that it was banned, its mere possession became a state crime, and it was later hailed as a major factor in the outbreak of the constitutional revolution. The first issue, published in 1890, set the tone for the following forty issues that appeared in the course of the next eight years. Headed with the slogan 'Unity, Justice, and Progress,' it began with a Muslim prayer in Arabic and continued with a long editorial in straightforward Persian stressing the need for rational laws:

God has blessed Iran. Unfortunately, His blessing has been negated by the lack of laws.

No one in Iran feels secure because no one in Iran is safeguarded by laws.

The appointment of governors is carried out without laws. The dismissal of officers is done without laws. The monopolies are sold without any laws. The state finances are squandered without laws.

The stomachs of innocent citizens are cut open without laws. Even the servants of God are deported without laws.

Every one in India, Paris, Tiflis, Egypt, Istanbul, and even among the Turkman tribes, knows his rights and duties. But no one in Iran knows his rights and duties.

By what law was this *mujtahed* deported?

By what law was that officer cut into pieces?

By what law was this minister dismissed?

By what law was that idiot given a robe of honor?

The servants of foreign diplomats have more security than the noble princes of Iran.

Even the brothers and sons of the Shah do not know what tomorrow will bring – whether exile to Iraq or flight for dear life to Russia. . . .⁵⁵

The following issues of *Qānūn* described the type of laws that would establish security and thus stimulate social progress: free discussion of all topics pertinent to public welfare; close alliance with the '*ulamā*'; termination of sectarian conflicts, especially between Sunnis and Shi'is, Shaykhīs and Mutashar'is; ending of concessions to foreign 'exploiters'; formation of societies that would propagate the principles of 'Humanity' (*Ādamiyat*) – the principles of 'Unity, Justice, and Progress'; and introduction of a national consultative assembly. It was the first appearance in Persian of the demand for a parliamentary government.

⁵⁵ Malkum Khan, 'God has Blessed Iran,' *Qānūn*, 1 (February 1890).

Many of these issues were summed up in a short column in the sixth issue of *Qānūn*:

A merchant from Qazvin writes: 'By what law does the government sell our national rights to foreign racketeers? These rights, according to both the principles of Islam and the traditional laws of Iran, belong to the people of our country. These rights are the means of our livelihood. The government, however, barter Muslim property to the unbelievers. By what law? Have the people of Iran died that the government is auctioning away their inheritance?'

Dear Merchant, the government has mistaken our inaction for our death. It is time for the *mujtaheds* and other knowledgeable persons to arise and save the people of Iran. We propose two simple remedies to save Iran: law and more law. You may well ask, 'Where will the law come from?' The answer is again simple: the Shah should call at once one hundred *mujtaheds* and other learned persons of the country into a national consultative assembly (*majlis-i shawrā-yi melli*); and this assembly should have full authority to formulate laws that would initiate social progress.⁵⁶

Although Malkum Khan was one of the first and foremost proponents of constitutional government, old-age infirmities prevented him from actively participating in the actual constitutional revolution. Thus, while the revolutionaries in Tehran hailed him as their mentor, reprinted his works, and sought his advice, Malkum Khan remained in exile and died in Europe in 1908 a few days after the outbreak of the civil war in Iran.

FROM PROTEST TO REVOLUTION, 1891-1905

The rising discontent of the propertied middle class and the modern intelligentsia burst into the open in the tobacco crisis of 1891-1892. The crisis was caused by Nasar al-Din Shah's sale of yet another concession, this time to an Englishman named Major Talbot. In return for a personal gift of £25,000 to the Shah, an annual rent of £15,000 to the state, and 25 percent of the yearly profits to Iran, Talbot acquired a fifty-year monopoly over the production, distribution, and exportation of tobacco. *Akhtar* (Star), a liberal newspaper published by exiled intellectuals in Istanbul, expressed the general concern of the Iranian middle class:

It is clear enough that the concessionaire will commence the work with a small capital and will purchase the tobacco from the cultivators and sell it to the merchants and manufacturers for higher prices, and all the profits will remain in the purse of the English. As the Persian merchants have no right to export tobacco from Persia, those who were formerly engaged in the trade will be obliged to give up their business and find some other work. The concession does not take into account how many merchants who were engaged in this business will be left without employment. . . .⁵⁷

The arrival of the company agents in Shiraz, the main tobacco region, was promptly met with a local strike. The local strike rapidly spread, thanks to the

⁵⁶ Malkum Khan, 'A Letter from Qazvin,' *Qānūn*, 6 (July 1890).

⁵⁷ Quoted by N. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892* (London, 1966), p. 49.

new telegraph system, into a general strike in the leading bazaars, particularly in Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashad, Qazvin, Yazd, and Kermanshah. The general strike, encouraged by the chief *mujtaheds*, spread further into a statewide consumers' boycott. And the consumers' boycott, sparking off dangerous mass demonstrations throughout the country, eventually forced the Shah to annul the concession. The upheaval revealed the fundamental changes that had taken place in nineteenth-century Iran. It demonstrated that local strikes could now spread into national rebellions, that the intelligentsia and the propertied middle class were capable of working together, and that the Shah, despite his exalted claims, possessed no large-scale instruments of coercion; he was simply towering over society like a Titan with feet of clay. The tobacco protest, in fact, was a dress rehearsal for the forthcoming constitutional revolution.

In the years after the tobacco crisis, Naser al-Din Shah turned toward more political repression and away from dangerous innovations. He sold few concessions, ended the growth of the Dar al-Funūn, forbade the opening of newschools, turned a blind eye when a religious mob burned down a modern teaching establishment, banned the import of liberal newspapers, tried to inflame tribal rivalries and communal antagonisms, terminated the grants of state scholarship for study abroad, and prohibited even his own relatives from visiting Europe. It was said that the Shah now preferred courtiers who did not know whether Brussels was a place or a vegetable. This period of reaction ended abruptly in 1896, however, when a bankrupt trader, who was also a devoted disciple of Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani' – the famous pan-Islamic propagandist – assassinated Naser al-Din Shah. The bullet that killed the Shah also began the demise of the old regime.

The new monarch, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, hastened the collapse of the old regime by reversing the policies of his predecessor. While negotiating new loans from Britain and Russia, partly to finance his 'medical' visits to Europe, and handing over the customs to Belgian officials as a financial guarantee, Muzaffar al-Din Shah inaugurated a liberal era. He relaxed the censorship, lifted the ban on travel, appointed Malkum Khan ambassador in Rome, opened the Schools of Agriculture and Political Science, and, most important of all, permitted the formation of commercial, cultural, and educational associations. A group of merchants in Isfahan formed the Shirkat-i Islāmī (Islamic Company), the country's first major stock company. Their intention was to 'preserve national independence' by protecting traditional handicrafts and fostering modern industries, especially textiles.⁵⁸ A circle of intellectuals in Tabriz, whose knowledge of Turkish enabled them to follow cultural trends in the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire, published an influential Persian-language journal named *Ganjeh-i Funūn* (Treasury of Knowledge).⁵⁹ Another group of intellectuals

⁵⁸ Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab*, I, 174–177.

⁵⁹ M. Mujtahedi, *Tarikh-i Zindigani-ii Taqizadeh* (The History of Taqizadeh's Life) (Tehran, 1942); H. Taqizadah, 'My Life,' *Rahenma-yi Ketab*, 13, 7 (May–June 1970), 243–266.

in Tehran formed the Society of Learning (*Anjuman-i Ma'āref*) and pooled their books to establish the country's first National Library (Kitābhāneh-i Mellī). Encouraged by the State, the Society of Learning helped private educators to open over fifty-five modern secondary schools. In inaugurating one of these schools, the chairman of the Society summed up his colleagues' sentiments:

It is education that separates humans from animals, useful citizens from useless ignoramuses, civilized beings from savage barbarians. Education generates light in cultural darkness. Education teaches us how to build steam engines, power plants, railways, and factories. Education has enabled Japan to transform itself in one generation from a backward weak society into an advanced powerful nation. Education, likewise, will enable Iran not only to regain its ancient glory, but also to create a new generation that will be conscious of individual equality, social justice, personal liberty, and national progress.⁶⁰

Muzaffar al-Din Shah initiated his liberal policy in the hope of satisfying the opposition. But the same policy, by coinciding with the intensified Western penetration, merely encouraged the opposition to form semiclandestine organizations. Of these organizations, the following five were to play significant roles in the revolution: the Secret Society (*Anjuman-i Makhfī*); the Secret Center (*Markaz-i Ghaybī*); the Social Democratic Party (*Hizb-i Ijtima'yūn-i 'Ami'yūn*); the Society of Humanity (*Jama'-i Ādamīyat*); and the Revolutionary Committee (*Komitech-i Inqilābī*).

The Secret Society, the most important of the organizations, was formed in Tehran in early 1905 by members of the '*ulamā*' and by merchants with close connections to the trading and craft guilds (*asnāf*). Nizam al-Islam Kermani, a founding member, has described the Society's conduct code and national program in a detailed diary published under the title *The History of the Iranian Awakening*.⁶¹ The code of conduct, taken as a vow on the Koran, promised secrecy, opposition to 'tyranny,' respect for the '*ulamā*', prayers at the end of each meeting, and acceptance of the Mahdi as the sole 'true protector' of the Society. The national program demanded a written legal code and a House of Justice ('*Adālatkhāneh*'), a survey for the registration of land, a just tax structure, military reforms, guidelines for the appointment and dismissal of provincial governors, encouragement of commerce, reorganization of customs, and implementation of the *shari'ah*. The Society, moreover, established contact with the leading '*ulamā*' in Karbala and Najaf, as well as with Sayyid Abdullah Behbehani and Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, two of the three important *mujtaheds* living in Tehran.

Whereas the Secret Society was formed predominantly by the propertied middle class, the other three organizations drew their small membership mainly from the modern intelligentsia. The Secret Center was organized in Tabriz by twelve young radicals associated with the journal *Ganjeh-i Funūn*.⁶² The group

⁶⁰ Quoted by Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab*, I, 153-154.

⁶¹ Nizam al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-i Bidari*, vol. I.

⁶² S. Javid, *Fedakaran-i Faramush-shudeh* (Forgotten Heroes) (Tehran, 1966); 'A.

was headed by 'Ali Karbalayi, a Shaykhī merchant who was nicknamed 'Monsieur' because of his interest in French literature and French political thought. The others in the group included three merchants who often traveled on business to Baku, a bookseller, a pharmacist, two tanners, a civil servant, and a young graduate of the local French missionary school. The Center focused its activities in the Tarbiyat Bookstore which was the main gathering place for the few local intellectuals interested in European languages and modern sciences.

The Iranian Social Democratic Party was founded in Baku in early 1904 by eleven émigrés from Iranian Azerbaijan who had been active for some time within the Russian Social Democratic Party.⁶³ Although the party was headed by intellectuals, it tried to open branches among the some 80,000 migrant workers from Iranian Azerbaijan employed in the Baku oil fields. The party program, which was mainly a translation from the economic demands of the Russian Social Democrats, called for the right of workers to organize and strike, an eight-hour work day, old-age pensions, a progressive income tax, distribution of land among those who tilled it, housing for the poor, free schools, reduction of consumer taxes, freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and toleration for all religions 'acceptable to the *shari'ah*.'⁶⁴ The Secret Center in Tabriz, which established close ties with the Social Democrats in Baku, circulated the party program within Iran.

While these two organizations were influenced by the revolutionary socialism of Russian Marxism, the Society of Humanity was inspired by the liberal humanism of Auguste Comte. The Society's founder, Mirza 'Abbas Quli Khan Qazvini, later surnamed Adamiyat (Humanity), was a disciple of Malkum Khan and a senior official in the Ministry of Justice. His son, Fereydun Adamiyat, the well-known historian of the constitutional movement, writes that the Society had three main aims: to use social engineering for national development; to secure individual freedom so that human reason could 'blossom'; and to obtain legal equality for all citizens, irrespective of birth and religion.⁶⁵ The Society drew its members mainly from the faculty of the Dar al-Funūn and from the upper, but not princely, ranks of the central administration. For the cry of legal equality appealed to the trained professionals' dislike of inherited privileges; the concept of social engineering promised them vital roles in the process of national development; the hope of liberty answered their craving for personal security from arbitrary government; and the ceremonial secrecy of the Society, which was copied from the European freemasons via Malkum Khan's Farāmūshkhāneh, protected them from both the conservatives authorities and the religious masses.

Iqbal, 'Sharifzadeh,' *Yadgar*, 3, 10 (May-June 1947), 58-73; K. Taherzadeh-Behzad, *Qiyam-i Azerbaijan dar Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Revolt of Azerbaijan in the Constitutional Revolution) (Tehran, 1953).

⁶³ S. Javid, *Nahzat-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The Constitutional Movement in Iran) (Tehran, 1968), pp. 60-70.

⁶⁴ Document, 'Concerning the Iranian Social Democratic Party,' *Donya*, 5, 2 (Summer 1966), 99-103; document, 'The Regulations of the Iranian Social Democratic Party,' *Donya*, 3, 4 (Winter 1962), 76-80.

⁶⁵ Adamiyat, *Fekr-i Azadi*, pp. 206-217.

Whereas the Society of Humanity was cautious in its immediate aims, the Revolutionary Committee was radical both in its strategy and in its tactics. According to Malekzadeh, whose father, Mirza Malek al-Motakallamin, headed the group, the Committee was composed of fifty-seven 'radical intellectuals' who frequented the National Library.⁶⁶ Meeting secretly in the suburbs of Tehran in May 1904, the fifty-seven drew up a plan for 'overthrowing despotism' and 'establishing the rule of law and justice.' The plan called for the exploitation of personal jealousies, as well as political differences, among the ministers, courtiers, and religious leaders, always taking care to support the less conservative against the more conservative; the establishment of contact with the popular and 'enlightened' religious leaders; the avoidance of all non-Islamic activities to allay the suspicions of the spiritual authorities, even though the Committee agreed that religious toleration was one of its 'fundamental principles'; and the use of sermons, articles, translations, lectures, and broadsheets to popularize the ideas of constitutional democracy among the Iranian masses. Malekzadeh commented years later that these secular radicals were obliged to seek the assistance of the '*ulamā*' because the 'lower class' was still dominated by the 'ruling class' of princes, tribal chiefs, and landed patrons.⁶⁷

The Revolutionary Committee reflected the sociological composition of the first generation intelligentsia. The 57 included 15 civil servants, 8 educators, 4 translators, 1 doctor, 14 clergymen (all of whom had studied modern subjects), 1 tribal chief, 3 merchants, and 4 craftsmen. All were acquainted with Western civilization through either the Dar al-Funūn, the study of European languages, the reading of recent translations, or the influence of Malkum Khan. Many of the 57 had reached middle-age. Three had been born into the Qajar nobility, 21 into '*ulamā*' households, 7 into civil service families, and 8 into bazaar households. Two were Zoroastrians, 1 was the leader of a Ni'matī order, and at least 5 were accused by the conservative clergy of being secret 'freethinkers.'⁶⁸

Thus the Iran of 1905 was rapidly moving toward a revolution. The propertied middle class, which had been traditionally suspicious of the monarchy, was now economically as well as ideologically alienated from the ruling dynasty. The modern intelligentsia, inspired by constitutionalism, secularism, and nationalism, was rejecting the past, questioning the present, and espousing a new vision of the future. Moreover, both the propertied middle class and the intelligentsia, despite their fundamental differences, were directing their attacks at the same target – the central government. Both were forming their own secret and semi-secret societies, associations, and political parties. Furthermore, both were aware that the Qajar dynasty was not only financially bankrupt, but also admini-

⁶⁶ Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab*, II, 5–18.

⁶⁷ M. Malekzadeh, *Zindigani-yi Malek al-Motakallemin* (The Life of Malek al-Motakallemin) (Tehran, 1946), p. 148.

⁶⁸ The biographical information has been obtained from interviews, miscellaneous newspapers, and M. Bamdad, *Tarikh-i Rajal-i Iran* (The History of Iranian Statesmen) Vols. I–IV (Tehran, 1968).

stratively weak, morally discredited, and, most crucial of all, militarily ineffective. The country awaited a final push to enter the constitutional revolution.

THE REVOLUTION, JUNE 1905—AUGUST 1906

The final push came through the economic crisis of early 1905. A bad harvest and a sudden disruption in the northern trade caused by a cholera epidemic, by heavy snows, by the Russo-Japanese War, and by the subsequent revolution in Russia, led to spiraling inflation throughout Iran. During the first three months of 1905, the price of sugar rose 33 percent and that of wheat by 90 percent in such cities as Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht, and Mashad.⁶⁹ The government, finding its customs revenues declining, its food costs rising, and its pleas for new foreign loans rejected, promptly raised tariffs on native merchants and postponed repayments to local creditors.⁷⁰ This triggered three public protests, each more intense than the last, culminating in the revolution of August 1906.

The first protest took the form of a peaceful procession during the religious mourning month of Muharram by some two hundred shopkeepers and money-lenders in Tehran. Requesting the repayment of government loans and the dismissal of Monsieur Naus, the Belgian customs director, the protestors closed their shops, distributed a photograph of Naus masquerading as a mulla at a fancy-dress ball, and proceeded, with a wealthy scarf-dealer at their head, to the sanctuary of Shah 'Adul 'Azim. A spokesman for the group summed up their grievances to the correspondent of *Habl al-Matin* (Firm Chord), a newspaper published by Iranian intellectuals in Calcutta: 'The government must reverse its present disastrous policy of helping Russian merchants, creditors, and manufacturers at the expense of Iranian businessmen. The government must protect our businessmen, even if their products are not yet as good as those of foreign competitors. If the present policy continues, our whole economy will be ruined.'⁷¹ After two weeks of negotiations, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, anxious to leave for another European tour, satisfied the protestors by promising to meet their demands as soon as he returned from Europe. His promise, however, never materialized; for the treasury remained bankrupt and the Russians threatened 'necessary measures' if the customs administration passed out of 'secure hands.'⁷²

The second protest erupted in December when the Governor of Tehran tried to lower sugar prices by bastinadoing two of the leading sugar importers. One of the victims was a highly respected 79-year-old merchant who had financed the

⁶⁹ *Habl al-Matin*, 2–23 March 1905.

⁷⁰ The Shah rejected a Russian offer of £350,000 which stipulated that a Russian officer should be placed in charge of all military contingents besides the Cossack brigade (British Minister to the Foreign Office, 'Annual Report for 1905,' F.O. 371/Persia 1906/106).

⁷¹ *Habl al-Matin*, 19 June 1905.

⁷² British Minister to the Foreign Office, 'Annual Report for 1905,' F.O. 371/Persia 1906/106.

repair of the central bazaar and the rebuilding of three mosques. He pleaded in vain that the high prices were caused not by hoarding but by the disruptions in Russia. According to one eyewitness, the news of the beatings 'flashed like lightning' through the bazaars.⁷³ Stores and workshops closed; guild elders organized a mass meeting in the central mosque; and two thousand merchants, guild leaders, theology students, and members of the '*ulamā*', headed by the two *mujtaheds* Tabatabai and Behbehani, took sanctuary at Shah 'Abdul 'Azim. From there, they sent to the government four main demands: replacement of the governor; dismissal of Naus; enforcement of the *sharī'ah*; and formation of a House of Justice ('*Adālatkhāneh*). At first, the court replied that such an institution would destroy all ranks 'even between noble princes and common grocers.'⁷⁴ One minister even added that if the ringleaders were unsatisfied with conditions in Muslim Iran they should emigrate to such non-Muslim 'democratic' countries as Germany. But after trying unsuccessfully to break the strike for a full month, the Shah finally agreed to all the demands. On their victorious return to Tehran, the protestors were greeted by huge crowds shouting 'Long Live the Nation of Iran.' Nizam al-Islam Kermani noted in his diary that this was the first time the phrase 'Nation of Iran' (*Millat-i Iran*) had been heard in the streets of Tehran.⁷⁵

The third protests broke out in the summer of 1906 during the month of Muḥarram. They were sparked off mainly by the failure of the Shah to convene a House of Justice and partly by the rash attempt of the police to round up a number of outspoken anti-government preachers. As the guilds called for another strike and the secret societies circulated angry broadsheets, an emotional crowd of theology students converged on the city police station where the preachers were detained. In the ensuing melee, the police shot dead one of the demonstrators who happened to be a *sayyid*. On the following morning, thousands of tradesmen, craftsmen, and theology students – many of them wearing white sheets as a sign of their willingness to die on a religious crusade – proceeded with the *sayyid*'s body from the main bazaar to a public funeral in the central mosque. Outside the mosque, however, they were intercepted by the Cossacks. The collision was brief but bloody: twenty-two lost their lives and over one hundred suffered serious injuries.⁷⁶ Since a river of blood now divided the court from the 'country,' some members of the '*ulamā*' began to openly compare the Qajars to the notorious Yazid, the Sunni leader who had martyred the Shi'i Imam Hussein.

The opposition reacted to the violence by organizing two massive demonstrations. Tabatabai, Bēhbehani, and other religious leaders, with the notable exception of the state-appointed *imām jum'eh*, took their families, retainers, and two thousand theology students to the holy shrine of Qum 90 miles south of Tehran. From Qum, they proclaimed that the country would be left without

⁷³ H. Qudsi, *Kitab-i Khatirat-i Man ya Tarikh-i Sad Saleh* (The Book of My Life or the History of One Hundred Years) (Tehran, 1963), I, 99–100.

⁷⁴ Malekzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab*, II, 104.

⁷⁵ Nizam al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-i Bidari*, I, 124.

⁷⁶ *Habl al-Matin*, 28 September 1906.

spiritual guidance – consequently, without judicial decisions and legal transactions – until the Shah fulfilled his earlier promises. The ‘*ulamā*’ had gone on strike.

Meanwhile, two prominent merchants – one of whom was active in the Secret Society – asked the British representatives whether they and their friends could obtain sanctuary (*bast*) in the summer residence of the British Legation in the village of Gulhak, a few miles north of Tehran. The British Legation, in a memorandum to London, detailed the subsequent events:

After the shooting, it appeared as if the Government had won the day. The town was in the hands of the troops. The popular leaders had fled. The bazaars were in the occupation of the soldiers. And there appeared to be no place of refuge. Under these circumstances the popular party had recourse to an expedient sanctified by old, and, indeed, immemorial custom – the rule of *bast*. It was resolved, failing all other recourses, to adopt this expediency. . . . Two persons called at the Legation at Gulak [sic] and asked whether, in case the people took *bast* in the British Legation, the Charge d’Affaires would invoke the aid of the military to remove them. Mr. Grant Duff expressed that he hoped that they would not have recourse to such an expediency, but he said it was not in his power, in view of the acknowledged custom in Persia, to use force if they came. . . . The following evening, fifty merchants and mullas appeared in the Legation and took up their quarters for the night. Their numbers gradually increased, and soon there were 14,000 persons in the Legation garden.⁷⁷

The 14,000, drawn predominantly from the bazaar, were led by a committee of guild masters. This committee allocated space to the various guilds: one visitor reported that he saw more than five hundred tents, ‘for all the guilds, even the cobblers, walnut sellers, and tinkers, each had at least one tent.’⁷⁸ The committee enforced discipline to safeguard their host’s property: the Legation later reported that almost nothing had been damaged, ‘although every semblance of a flower-bed had been trampled out of existence and the trees still bear pious inscriptions cut in the bark.’⁷⁹ It organized women’s demonstrations outside the Royal Palace and British Legation. It also controlled entry into the Legation, admitting only students and faculty from the Dar al-Funūn and the Schools of Agriculture and Political Science. These new arrivals, according to Nizam al-Islam Kermani, converted the Legation into ‘one vast open-air school of political science by giving lectures on constitutional systems in Europe.’⁸⁰ According to another eyewitness, some of the students from the Dar al-Funūn spoke even on the advantages of the republican form of government.⁸¹ The committee, moreover, took the precaution of raising money from wealthy merchants to help the poorer wage earners who could not afford a prolonged strike. One participant wrote in his memoirs:

⁷⁷ Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia* (London, 1909), I, pp. 3–4.

⁷⁸ Kasravi, *Tarikh-i Mashruteh*, p. 110.

⁷⁹ Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia*, I, 4.

⁸⁰ Nizam al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-i Bidari*, I, 274.

⁸¹ Hajji Ahmad Tarresh Husseini, *Ruznameh-i Akhbar-i Mashrutiyat* (A Diary of the Constitution) (Tehran, 1972), p. 40.

I clearly remember the day when we heard that the reactionaries were busy sowing discontent among the junior carpenters and sawyers. The former, being angry at having been taken away from their livelihood wanted to know what they had to gain from the whole venture. The latter, being illiterate and irrational, were reluctant to accept any logical arguments. If these two irresponsible groups had walked out, our whole movement would have suffered. Fortunately, we persuaded them to remain in *bast*.⁸²

Finally, the committee of guild elders, on the advice of modern educated colleagues, demanded from the Shah not just a House of Justice but a Constituent National Assembly to draft a written constitution.

At first, the court dismissed the protestors as a 'bunch of traitors hired by the British.'⁸³ But confronted by a sustained general strike in Tehran and a flood of telegrams from the provinces, it offered the less democratic-sounding 'Islamic Assembly.'⁸⁴ But again confronted by the nonnegotiable demand for an elected 'National Assembly,' by angry telegrams from the Iranian community in Baku threatening to send 'armed volunteers',⁸⁵ and by the 'fatal announcement' that even the Cossacks, whose pay was in arrears, were preparing to defect,⁸⁶ the court eventually capitulated. On 5 August almost one full month after the first protestors took refuge in the Legation, Muzaffar al-Din Shah signed a proclamation for the convening of a Constituent National Assembly. Years later, an Iranian Marxist journalist, commenting on the anarchist theory of revolution, wrote that the 1905–1906 revolution was unique in the annals of bourgeois revolutions, for if proved that, under special circumstances, peaceful protests, mass meetings, and general strikes could bring down the old order.⁸⁷

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CONSTITUTION, AUGUST 1906–OCTOBER 1907

Although the revolution appeared to be over by August 1906, the process of drafting a constitution turned into a prolonged struggle lasting until October 1907. The Constituent Assembly convened in Tehran in September 1906 to formulate an electoral law for the forthcoming National Assembly. The delegates were mostly merchants, members of the 'ulamā', and bazaar guild elders.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, the Electoral Law reflected their social backgrounds.⁸⁹ The electorate was divided into six 'classes' (*ṭabaqāt*): princes and Qajars; 'ulamā' and

⁸² M. Heravi-Khurasani, *Tarikh-i Paydayish-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The History of the Genesis of the Iranian Constitution) (Tehran, 1953), p. 50.

⁸³ Recounted by Shaykh Yousef, *Muzakerat-i Majlis-i Shawra-yi Melli* (The Proceedings of the National Assembly), First Majlis, p. 351.

⁸⁴ Some members of the opposition feared that the court would bar them from such an 'Islamic Assembly' by denouncing them as 'heretics' (Nizam al-Islam, *Tarikh-i Bidari*, I, 329).

⁸⁵ Quoted by *ibid.*, p. 359.

⁸⁶ Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia*, I, p. 4.

⁸⁷ H. Arsanjani, 'Anarchism in Iran,' *Darya*, 17 July 1944.

⁸⁸ Malekyadeh, *Tarikh- Inqilab*, II, 180.

⁸⁹ Translations of the constitutional laws have been reprinted in Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, pp. 354–400.

theology students; notables (*a'yān*) and aristocrats (*ashrāf*); merchants with a 'definite place of business'; landowners with at least 1,000 tomans of property;⁹⁰ and craftsmen-tradesmen from 'recognized guilds' and with a shop whose rent was equivalent to at least the 'average rent of the locality.' The elections in the provinces were to be carried out in two stages: each 'class' in every district sending one delegate to the provincial capital; these delegates, in turn, electing their provincial representatives to the National Assembly. The elections in Tehran, however, were to be carried out in one stage: the Qajars nominating 4 deputies; the landowners 10; the '*ulamā*' 4; the merchants 10; and the guilds as many as 32 out of a total of 156 parliamentary seats.

The elections for the National Assembly acted as a catalyst for the development of political organizations. In the provincial cities, the bazaar guilds, urged by the merchants and the '*ulamā*', rushed to form regional assemblies independent of, and invariably opposed to, the provincial governors. In the capital, over thirty societies appeared on the political arena. Some, such as the Society of Guilds, Society of Scribes, Society of Theology Students, were occupational associations. Others, for example, the Society of Azerbaijanis, Society of Armenians, Society of Jews, Society of Southern Iranians, were communal associations. All, however, supported the revolution and campaigned to elect their favorite candidates to the National Assembly. The press was equally active. The number of papers and journals published within Iran jumped from six on the eve of the revolution to over one hundred during the six months after the Constituent Assembly. Many carried optimistic, nationalistic, and radical titles, such as *Taraqī* (Progress), *Bidāri* (Awakening), *Vatan* (Fatherland), *Ādamīyat* (Humanity), *Ittihād* (Unity), *Umīd* (Hope), and '*Asr-i Now*' (The New Age). Members of the Secret Center in Tabriz published *Āzād* (Free) and *Mujāhed* (Freedom Fighter). Nizam al-Islam Kermani, of the Secret Society in Tehran, came out with *Nidā-yi Vatan* (Voice of the Fatherland). Four members of the Revolutionary Committee edited their own papers named *Huqūq* (Rights), *Musavat* (Equality), *Rūh-i al-Quds* (Holy Spirit), and *Sūr-i Isrāfil* (Trumpet Call of Israfil). It seemed that the opposition, after years of enforced silence, was now rushing to the printing presses to pour out all its new, as well as old, political ideas.

The National Assembly opened in October. Predictably, the important role of the propertied middle class was reflected in the social composition of the deputies: 26 percent were guild elders, 20 percent clergymen, and 15 percent merchants.⁹¹ The Assembly's political complexion became apparent, also predictably, in the gradual formation of three loose but distinct 'tendencies' (*maslak*): the Royalists (Mostabed); the Moderates (Mo'tadel); and the Liberals (Azadikhah). The Royalists, formed mainly of landed aristocrats, shied away

⁹⁰ The 1,000 tomans included much of the medium-incomed landowners, but not the self-employed farmers.

⁹¹ Z. Shajī'i, *Nemayandegan-i Majlis-i Shawra-yi Melli dar Bistuyek Dawreh-i Qanun-guzari* (The Members of the National Assembly during Twenty-One Legislative Sessions) (Tehran, 1965), p. 176.

from parliamentary debates because of the small size of their group. The Moderates, composed of the propertied middle class deputies, made up the vast majority of the Assembly. They were headed by two wealthy merchants: Muhammad 'Ali Shalfurush (Scarf-dealer), the leader of the peaceful procession to Shāh 'Abdul 'Azim in June 1905; and Amin al-Zarb, a former farmer of the royal mint and the main financier of the *bast* in the British Legation, who, despite heavy exactions by Naser al-Din Shah, was still the wealthiest man in Iran. The Moderates also received valuable support from Tabatabai and Behbehani, who, while not actual deputies, frequently participated in parliamentary debates.

Whereas the Moderates drew their support mainly from the propertied middle class, the Liberals represented predominantly the intelligentsia. Although planning extensive reforms, even secular reforms, the Liberals soft-pedaled their radicalism, for the time being, in order to work together with the Moderates to draft a satisfactory constitution. Their small group of twenty-one deputies was led by Sayyid Hassan Taqizadeh, an eloquent representative from Tabriz, who, in his own words, had broken with his conservative clerical past to pursue his 'burning interest' in the Western sciences, especially medicine.⁹² Most of the twenty-one belonged to either the Revolutionary Committee, the Society of Humanity, or the Ganjeh-i Funūn. Some were elected by the Shaykhī community in Tabriz, some by the guilds in Tehran, and some by the Assembly itself to fill vacancies caused by deaths and resignations.⁹³ Although these secular-radicals gradually alienated their religious-traditional allies, and eventually after 1909 split apart the constitutional movement, they were anxious in 1906–1907 to cooperate with the Moderates to draw up the constitutional laws.

The deputies began to draft the constitution by first safeguarding the role of parliament. In a document that later became known as the Fundamental Laws, the powers of the National Assembly were extensively spelled out. As the 'representative of the whole People,' the National Assembly had the 'right in all questions to propose any measure it regards as conducive to the well-being of the Government and the People.' It had final determination over all laws, decrees, budgets, treaties, loans, monopolies, and concessions. It was to hold sessions lasting two years, during which period its members could not be arrested without the permission of the Assembly. As a concession to the court, the Shah was given the authority to nominate thirty out of sixty members to an Upper House. But the National Assembly reserved the right to define at a later date the exact role of this Senate. Having unanimously acclaimed the document, the deputies rushed it to the ailing Shah. The Shah, at the urging of his spiritual advisers who surrounded his deathbed, ratified the Fundamental Laws on 30 December, only five days before he died.

The new monarch, Muhammad 'Ali Shah, who had governed Azerbaijan

⁹² H. Taqizadeh, 'My Life,' *Rahenna-yi Ketab*, 13, 7 (May–June 1970), 243–266.

⁹³ H. Taqizadeh, 'List of Members of the First Majlis,' *Kaveh*, 15 July 1918.

with an iron hand as heir apparent, was determined to rule Iran less like his father, Muzaffar al-Din Shah, and more like his grandfather, Naser al-Din Shah. He promptly slighted the deputies by not inviting them to his coronation. He tried, unsuccessfully, to retain Naus and to negotiate a new loan from Britain and Russia. He encouraged his ministers to ignore the National Assembly and ordered his governors to disregard the provincial assemblies. He tried to weaken the opposition by reviving communal conflicts, especially between Shaykhis and Mutashar'is in Tabriz, and among Āzeris, Arabs, and Persian-speakers in Tehran. Moreover, he nominated as his prime minister Amin al-Sultan, a former conservative premier who now, as a result of a recent visit to Japan, argued that reforms could not be carried out without a strong determined central government.

But the main struggle between the Shah and National Assembly evolved around the completion of the constitution. The deputies, working with a translation of the Belgian constitution, formulated a parliamentary system of government. Their finished document, entitled the Supplementary Fundamental Laws, was divided into two main sections. The first was a 'bill of rights' guaranteeing each citizen equality before the law, protection of 'life, property, and honor,' safeguards from arbitrary arrest, and freedom to organize associations as well as publish newspapers. The second section, while accepting the principle of 'separation of powers,' concentrated power in the Legislative at the expense of the Executive Branch. In addition to the authority given to it in the Fundamental Laws, the Legislative Branch now obtained the power to appoint, investigate, and dismiss premiers, ministers, and cabinets, to judge ministers for 'delinquencies,' and to approve all annual military expenditures. The Executive, on the other hand, was declared to 'appertain' to the Shah but to be carried out by the Ministers. The Shah was to take his oath of office before the deputies. His court budget had to be approved by the National Assembly. His immediate relatives were barred from the Cabinet. His 'person' was 'vested' with only the nominal command of the armed forces. His sovereignty was described to be derived from the People, not from God: 'The sovereignty is a trust confided (as a Divine gift) by the People to the person of the King.' His ministers, being responsible to parliament alone, could not 'divest themselves of their responsibilities by pleading orders from the Monarch'. In fact, the Shah retained only one important source of power: the prerogative to appoint half of the Senate. But since the Senate was not convened for 43 years, even this turned out to be a hollow privilege.

The National Assembly, in adopting the Belgian constitution, made two major adaptations to suit the Iranian situation. It recognized the existence of provincial councils and assemblies by endowing them with the authority to 'exercise free supervision over all laws connected with the public interest provided that they observe the limitations prescribed by the Law.' And it acknowledged, in a number of clauses, the importance of religion in general and of the religious leaders in particular. The Twelver Doctrine of Shi'ism was declared to be the

state religion of Iran. The ecclesiastical courts were given extensive jurisdiction over the *shari'ah*. Non-Muslims were barred from the cabinet. The Executive undertook the responsibility of banning 'heretical' organizations and publications. Moreover, the '*ulamā*' were promised a 'supreme committee' of five *mujtaheds* who were to scrutinize the spiritual validity of all legislation introduced into parliament until the 'appearance of the Mahdi (May God Hasten His Advent).' Traditional Shi'ism had been incorporated into modern constitutionalism. To paraphrase Montesquieu, the 'spirit' of the society had helped formulate the 'laws' of the state.

The Shah, fearing the demise of all royal authority, refused to ratify the Supplementary Fundamental Laws. Instead, he denounced the leaders of the opposition as 'heretics' and 'subversive republicans.' He proclaimed that as a 'good Muslim' he could accept the Islamic term *mashrū'* (lawful) but not the alien concept *mashrūt* (constitutional).⁹⁴ In the same breath, he waxed enthusiastic for the German constitution, which permitted the Head of State to appoint all ministers, including the War Minister. He further proposed that the Shah should enjoy real as well as nominal command of the armed forces and retain personal control over a future palace guard of 10,000 men.

These counterproposals sparked off mass protests throughout the cities, especially in Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashad, Enzeli, Rasht, Kerman, and Kermanshah. For example, at Kermanshah, the British consul reported: 'All the trades of the bazaar, down to the porters, went into *bast* in the telegraph office.'⁹⁵ At Tabriz, 20,000 demonstrators, drawn from the Mutashar'ī as well as the Shaykhī wards, vowed to remain on strike 'until the constitution was ratified.'⁹⁶ At Tehran, the many associations formed a Central Society, organized a general strike in the bazaar and in the government bureaucracy, held a mass meeting of 50,000 in the central square, and armed 3,000 men for the defense of the National Assembly. Meanwhile, a money lender from Tabriz with probable ties to the Social Democratic Party assassinated the prime minister and promptly committed suicide.⁹⁷ The following day, 100,000 mourners assembled to pay homage to the dead assassin and demonstrate support for the constitution.

The Shah, shaken by the assassination and the mass demonstrations, retreated. As one European observer commented: 'The Shah with his unarmed, unpaid, ragged, starving soldiers, what else can he do in face of the menace of a general strike and public riots.'⁹⁸ He named as prime minister Naser al-Mulk, a liberal-inclined and Oxford-educated nobleman. He sought admission into the Society of Humanity and promised to implement a program based on Comte's Religion of Humanity. He sent his princes to parliament to take the oath of allegiance to the

⁹⁴ For a discussion of these terms see H. Taqizadeh, 'The First National Assembly,' *Ittila'at-i Mahaneh*, 5, 5 (July-August 1954), 3-6.

⁹⁵ Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia*, I, 27.

⁹⁶ Kasravi, *Tarikh-i Mashruteh*, p. 519.

⁹⁷ See N. Keddie, 'The Assassination of Amin as-Sultan,' in C. E. Bosworth, ed., *Iran and Islam* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 316-319.

⁹⁸ Quoted by Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, p. 137.

constitution. And he himself followed a few days later, meekly entering the National Assembly, vowing to respect the constitution, and publicly placing the royal seal upon the Supplementary Fundamental Laws. The Shah who had intended to perpetuate the Qajar form of despotism had been forced to accept the modern system of parliamentary constitutionalism. Although Muhammad 'Ali Shah tried to undo the revolution through his coup d'état of June 1908, the victory of the constitutionalists in the brief civil war of June 1908–July 1909 again secured the achievements of the revolution. In theory, the Fundamental Laws and the Supplementary Fundamental Laws remain to the present day the two main pillars of the Iranian constitution.

REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS VERSUS REVOLUTIONARY CLASSES

The primary sources substantiate the accepted interpretation that the ideas of the West, especially the concepts of constitutionalism, nationalism, and secularism, helped undermine the political system of Qajar Iran. For constitutionalism introduced the radical notion that the power of the monarch should be limited not merely by loosely defined concepts of social justice and medieval kingship, but by well-defined institutions of representative government. Nationalism brought in the conviction that the state should be the organized expression of the people, not the patrimony of the ruling dynasty. Secularism, on one hand, stimulated the desire to borrow from the West, since the West had proved its scientific superiority over the East; and, on the other hand, it reinforced the existing conviction of the central administrators that the affairs of state should be separate from the doctrines of religion, the interests of politics separate from the principles of faith, the responsibilities of government separate from the teachings of the '*ulamā*'.

The introduction of Western ideas, together with the gradual expansion of the central administration, created a new revolutionary class: the modern intelligentsia. Educated in the new secular schools, the intelligentsia was cut off from both the religious scholars and the conservative court literati. Employed mainly in the state bureaucracy, it abhorred the traditional structure that placed public administrators' lives, property, and honor at the mercy and whim of the Shah-an-Shahs. Drawn predominantly from outside the Qajar nobility, it favored the opening of careers to talents and opposed the sale of offices to those with royal pedigrees. Inspired by Western ideas, it believed that the country could rapidly progress if the arbitrary will of kings was replaced with the predictable rule of laws, the power of dynasties with the authority of elected representatives, the traditional art of communal manipulation with the modern science of social engineering. In short, the intelligentsia wanted to supplant Oriental despotism with Western constitutionalism.

The central question, however, is not whether Western ideas, and their exponents, the intelligentsia, played a role in the constitutional revolution; but whether they played the major definitive role. In comparing the importance of

the intelligentsia with that of the propertied middle class, it is clear that the latter far overshadowed the former. Whereas the secular intellectuals numbered at most in the hundreds, the bazaar population of merchants, traders, craftsmen, and merchants totaled at least in the hundred thousands. Whereas the liberal newspapers were handicapped by mass illiteracy, the religious authorities could attract at any time large congregations. Whereas the new political associations of 1904–1905 mustered no more than a few hundred members, the old bazaar guilds were able to mobilize over 14,000 protesters into the British Legation. Whereas the modern-educated radicals transformed the request for a House of Justice into the nonnegotiable demand for a Constituent Assembly, it was the traditional-minded merchants, guild elders, and mosque preachers that successfully organized public demonstrations, mass meetings, bazaar stoppages, and nationwide general strikes. Whereas the Liberal deputies translated the Belgian constitution, the Moderates adapted it to local conditions and legislated it into law. Whereas European history influenced a small elite, it was the Islamic past that inspired the general masses. At times of crisis, the public moved into action not with images of Cromwell, Robespierre, Voltaire, Tennis Courts, and besieged Bastilles, but with traditional concepts of social justice and emotional symbols derived from the Shi'i heritage – especially from the martyrdom of Hussein and his family. In short, the modern intellectuals were advisers to the revolutionaries, but the traditional guild members of the bazaars were the actual revolutionaries.

The dominant role of the propertied middle class became even more apparent in later years, especially in 1910, when the constitutional movement, having won the civil war, split into two opposing streams. While the religious-conservatives, led by Tabatabai and Behbehani, channeled the bazaars into the Moderate Party (Firqeh-i I'tedal), the secular-radicals, headed by Taqizadeh, organized the intelligentsia into the rival Democratic Party (Firqeh-i Demokrat). But within one year, the Democratic Party was in disarray; its deputies were outvoted in parliament; its leaders, denounced as 'heretics' by the religious authorities, were forced to flee into exile; and its organization had become the target of mass protests mobilized by the bazaar guilds. In a direct clash between the intelligentsia and the propertied middle class, the latter won hands down. Even the conventional historians, who had argued that modern ideas caused the revolution, later claimed that the 'traditional,' 'superstitious,' 'backward,' and 'illiterate' masses determined the eventual failure of the constitutional movement. For example, Kasravi, who began his monumental *History of the Iranian Constitution* with an introduction on how modern ideas 'awakened' the country, spent the last years of his life describing why the public remained 'backward,' 'traditional,' 'corrupt,' 'unenlightened,' and 'unawakened.'⁹⁹ Another writer, Ahmad Majd al-Islam Kermani, started his *History of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran* with praise for the importance of modern ideas, but concluded with a lament on the persistence of traditional sentiments among the masses and the limited

⁹⁹ A. Kasravi, *Inqilabi Christ? (What Is a Revolution?)* (Tehran, 1945).

circulation of the same modern ideas among less than 'one thousand enlightened individuals.'¹⁰⁰

Although the ideological impact of the West has been grossly overestimated, the socioeconomic impact of the West can be described as the major determining cause of the constitutional revolution. For the economic penetration of Iran integrated the many regional economies into one national economy; the formation of the national economy gradually alleviated the traditional conflicts among the various urban communities, especially between Shaykhī and Mutashar'ī craftsmen, between Ḥaydarī and Ni'matī traders, and among Tehrani, Tabrizi, Isfahani, Qazvini, and Shirazi merchants; the alleviation of communal conflicts, helped create a propertied middle class; the propertied middle class, threatened by foreign competitors and local compradors, became a discontented national bourgeoisie, aware of both its own strengths and the weaknesses of the ruling dynasty; and the discontented national bourgeoisie, encouraged by the traditional antistate sentiments of the Shi'ī 'ulamā', developed into a revolutionary class. Economic changes had caused social changes; social changes, in turn, had led to political changes. To paraphrase Marx, it was not the introduction of revolutionary consciousness that created the new social order; but, on the contrary, it was the existence of the new social order that permitted the adaption of selective aspects from the modern revolutionary consciousness.

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¹⁰⁰ A. Majd al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran* (The History of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran) (Isfahan, 1972), III, 21.