Errand Abrahamian

THE CAUSES OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION IN IRAN
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 mujtahid 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. . . .

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, Shaykhis and Mutashari's; 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 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, barters 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 mujaheds 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 mujaheds and other learned persons of the country into a national consultative assembly (majlis-i shawrā-yi mellī); 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 concessionnaire 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 take 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

54 Malkum Khan, 'A Letter from Qazvin,' Qānūn, 6 (July 1890).
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 mujaheds, 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-Funun, forbade the opening of new schools, 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 Islami (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. Another group 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 Funun (Treasury of Knowledge).
in Tehran formed the Society of Learning (Anjuman-i Ma‘āref) and pooled their books to establish the country’s first National Library (Kitābkhāneh-i Melli). 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 Ījtima‘yūn-i ‘Armiyūn); the Society of Humanity (Jama‘-i Ādamiyat); and the Revolutionary Committee (Komiteh-i Inqilābi).

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 (asmāf). 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 Isqilāb, 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 Shaykhi merchant who was nicknamed ‘Mon-
sieur’ 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. 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.’ 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 Quii 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. The Society drew its  
members mainly from the faculty of the Dar al-Funûn 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 develop-
ment; the hope of liberty answered their craving for personal security from arbi-
trary government; and the ceremonial secrecy of the Society, which was copied  
from the European freemasons via Malkum Khan’s Farânumushkhânéh, protected  
them from both the conservatives authorities and the religious masses.  

Iqbal, ‘Sharifzadeh,’ Yadgar, 3, 10 (May–June 1947), 58–73; K. Taherzadeh–Behzad,  
Qiyan-i Azerbaijan dar Inqilab-i Mahrutiyat-i Iran (The Revolt of Azerbaijan in the  
Constitutional Revolution) (Tehran, 1953).  

61 S. Javid, Nahsat-i Mahrutiyat-I Iran (The Constitutional Movement in Iran)  
(Tehran, 1968), pp. 60–70.  

62 Document, ‘Concerning the Iranian Social Democratic Party,’ Donya, 5, 2 (Summer  

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. 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 ‘ulama’ because the ‘lower class’ was still dominated by the ‘ruling class’ of princes, tribal chiefs, and landed patrons.

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-Funun, 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 ‘ulama’ households, 7 into civil service families, and 8 into bazaar households. Two were Zoroastrians, 1 was the leader of a Ni’mati order, and at least 5 were accused by the conservative clergy of being secret ‘freethinkers.’

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-

44 Malekzadeh, Tariikh-i Imilah, II, 5–18.
46 The biographical information has been obtained from interviews, miscellaneous newspapers, and M. Bamdad, Tariikh-i Rajal-i Iran (The History of Iranian Statesmen) Vols. I–IV (Tehran, 1968).
stratifiedly 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. 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. 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.’

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.’

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

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67 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).
68 Habl al-Matin, 19 June 1905.
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. 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 ‘ulama’, 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 Naas; enforcement of the shari‘ah; and formation of a House of Justice (‘Adilatkhâneh). At first, the court replied that such an institution would destroy all ranks ‘even between noble princes and common grocers.’ 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.

The third protests broke out in the summer of 1906 during the month of Muharram. 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. Since a river of blood now divided the court from the ‘country,’ some members of the ‘ulama’ 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, Behbehani, and other religious leaders, with the notable exception of the state-appointed imâm 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. Qudsí, Kitab-i Khatirat-i Man ya Tarikh-i Sad Suleh (The Book of My Life or the History of One Hundred Years) (Tehran, 1963), 1, 99–100.
74 Malekzadeh, Tarikh-i Inqilab, II, 104.
75 Nizam al-Islam Kermani, Tarikh-i Bidari, 1, 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 ‘ulama’ 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.

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.’ 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.’ 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 Kermāni, converted the Legation into ‘one vast open-air school of political science by giving lectures on constitutional systems in Europe.’ According to another eyewitness, some of the students from the Dar al-Funūn spoke even on the advantages of the republican form of government. 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:

78 Kasravi, Tarikh-i Mashruteh, p. 119.
79 Great Britain, Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia, I, 4.
80 Nizam al-Islam Kermāni, Tarikh-i Bidari, I, 274.
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.

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.' 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.’ 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', and by the 'fatal announcement' that even the Cossacks, whose pay was in arrears, were preparing to defect, 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.

**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. Not surprisingly, the Electoral Law reflected their social backgrounds. The electorate was divided into six ‘classes’ (tābaqāt): princes and Qajars; ‘ulamā’ and

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64 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, *Tāriḵ-i Bidari*, I: 29).
65 Quoted by ibid., p. 359.
66 Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs the Affairs of Persia*, I, p. 4.
69 Translations of the constitutional laws have been reprinted in Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, pp. 354–400.
theology students; notables (a'yân) and aristocrats (ashrâf); merchants with a 'definite place of business'; landowners with at least 1,000 tomans of property; 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 'ulama' 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 'ulamâ', 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 Azerbaijani, 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 Taraqqi (Progress), Bidâri (Awakening), Vatan (Fatherland), Adamiyat (Humanity), Ittihâd (Unity), Umid (Hope), and 'Asr-i Now (The New Age). Members of the Secret Center in Tabriz published Azâd (Free) and Mujâhed (Freedom Fighter). Nizam al-Islam Kermani, of the Secret Society in Tehran, came out with Nidâ-yi Vâtan (Voice of the Fatherland). Four members of the Revolutionary Committee edited their own papers named Huqûq (Rights), Musarat (Equality), Rûh-i al-Quds (Holy Spirit), and Sûr-i Israîl (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. 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 from the self-employed farmers.

90 The 1,000 tomans included much of the medium-income landowners, but not the
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 'Azīm 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 Nāser al-Dīn Shāh, was still the wealthiest man in Iran. The Moderates also received valuable support from Tabatabai and Behbehāni, 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. 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 Shaykhi community in Tabriz, some by the guilds in Tehran, and some by the Assembly itself to fill vacancies caused by deaths and resignations. 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 Shāh, who had governed Azerbaycan

with an iron hand as heir apparent, was determined to rule Iran less like his father, Muzzafar 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 Azeris, 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).'</sup10> 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 mashru' (lawful) but not the alien concept mashriq (constitutional).<sup>94</sup> 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, Erzeli, 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.'<sup>95</sup> At Tabriz, 20,000 demonstrators, drawn from the Mutashar'i as well as the Shaykhī wards, vowed to remain on strike 'until the constitution was ratified.'<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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.'<sup>98</sup> 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

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<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of these terms see H. Taqizadeh, 'The First National Assembly,' Ittīlaʿat-i Mahaneh, 5, 5 (July–August 1954), 3-6.
<sup>95</sup> Great Britain, Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia, I, 27.
<sup>96</sup> Kasravī, Tarikh-i Mashruṭeh, p. 519.
<sup>98</sup> 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 'ulama'.

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 musteredit 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.’ 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

circulation of the same modern ideas among less than ‘one thousand enlightened individuals.’

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 Mutasharī craftsmen, between Haydari and Ni‘matī traders, and among Tehranī, Tabrizī, Isfahānī, Qazvīnī, and Shirāzī 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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