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## The Iranian Communist Movement under the Comintern: a sketch, 1919-1943

### Introduction

The history of the Iranian Communist movement is closely linked with the absorption of Iran into the capitalist world market. This process began in the aftermath of Iran's two military defeats by expansionist Russia and its loss of substantial territories ceded in the 1813 and 1828 treaties.<sup>1</sup> In direct consequence of these treaties, and those subsequently signed with Britain, Iran's traditional economy underwent drastic restructuring, linking its production to the needs of the capitalist world market. Given the country's geo-political situation between an expansionist Russia and British colonialism in the East, the manpower released from the traditional crafts and agriculture, which were now ruined in consequence of the new economic relations, could not be absorbed into the new, colonial economic structure. It had to emigrate massively. It was mostly attracted to Iran's former Caucasian territories recently ceded to the Russian Empire, where capitalist development was making rapid strides.

As a result of the difficulties that this massive immigration created for the militant labor movement in the Russian Empire and its organizations in the Caucasus, the politicization of Iranian immigrants in that region became inevitable. Iranians were drawn into the strike movement and political organizations, of which the Iranian Social Democratic Party (*Ferqeh-yi Ejtemâ'iyun-Amîyun, Mojahed; FEAM*)<sup>2</sup> was the most successful in recruiting Iranians. This organization played a significant role in the Persian Constitutional Revolution in 1906-1909,<sup>3</sup> which broke out just after Japan's defeat of Russia and the outbreak of the Russian revolution. Because of Czarist pressure, British complicity and its own internal weaknesses, the Constitutional system introduced in 1908-1909 was again dismantled in late 1911. This disappointing experience drove the more radical elements of the Social-Democratic movement to create, a few years later, a more revolutionary organization for the leadership of the popular movement in the country.

### 1. The Birth of the Communist Movement and the Stages of its Development

Thus, during the Great War the Iranian Communist movement came into being in the oil fields of Baku among the more radical members of the FEAM. The radical veterans of the FEAM felt all the more justified in their new position as their country was now occupied by the belligerent parties engaged in the Great War, namely, the Russians, British and Turks, as well as German spies. What is more, a national-revolutionary movement, the so-called *Jangali* (Forest) movement, led by a veteran Constitutionalist, Mirza Kuchek Khan, had come into being in Iran's Caspian provinces, which, at that time, were occupied by Russian troops.<sup>4</sup>

After the fall of Czarism, which gave a new impetus to the revolutionary movement inside Iran, the Iranian Communist movement soon extended itself to the northern regions of the country. The movement was the first of its kind in the East; and, as it happened, the first to be liquidated under the joint assault of Stalinism in Soviet Russia and the Pahlavi military dictatorship, installed in the early 1920's in Iran.

The history of Iranian Communism proper is represented by the activities of the Iranian Communist

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<sup>1</sup> For a history of Anglo-Russian relations with Iran see M. Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828* (Minneapolis, 1980) and Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914. A Study in Imperialism* (London, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> For its history, see Schapour Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan. Die sozialistische Bewegung im Iran seit Ende des 19. Jh. bis 1922* (Berlin, [1973]), ch. II, and Cosroe Chaqueri (ed.), *La Social-démocratie en Iran. Articles et documents* (Florence, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> See Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution 1905-1909* (Cambridge, 1910), and Cosroe Chaqueri, *Social-Democracy in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911* (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, pp. 279ss.

Party (*Ferqeh-yi Komonist-i Iran*; FKI). After the invasion of Iran by the Allies in late Summer 1941, a new party, the Tudeh Party of Iran (*Hezb-i Tudeh-yi Iran*; HTI), was organized under the auspices of the Comintern by a group of Iranian reformers. The most prominent founders were avowedly Communist and/or had previously belonged to the FKI. Including the first few years of the HTI while the Comintern was still operative, the history of the Iranian Communist movement may be periodized as follows:

1) The formative years (summer 1916-June 1920), which corresponded to a period when the Iran was occupied by foreign troops, the economy was in ruins, and poverty and famine ravaged the country, thereby preparing the terrain for a resurgence of revolutionary activity by radical elements who had taken part in the Constitutional Revolution:

a) the formation of the 'Adalat (Justice) Party by the militant working-class members of the FEAM (summer 1916-spring 1917);

b) the extension of party organizations to the interior of Iran, and the creation of the FKI (summer 1918-spring 1920).

2) The participation of the FKI in the government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran (SSRI) at Gilan, a period characterized by the revolutionary élan under the leadership of Kuchek Khan who had launched partisan warfare against the occupying armies in the north of the country,<sup>5</sup> (June 1920-September 1921):

a) the first coalition government of the SSRI in Gilan (June 5-July 15, 1920);

b) the revolutionary take-over by the FKI of the SSRI (August 1920-April 1921);

c) the second coalition government of the SSRI (April-September 1921).

3) The non-revolutionary, semi-legal phase (fall 1921-fall 1925), the period which witnessed the rise of Iran's military dictatorship under Reza Khan, who had been brought to power by the British-led coup d'état of February 1921, aiming at the suppression of the revolutionary movement and anti-British resistance across the country.

4) The total repression and the reorganization of the FKI, the militant phase (1926-1931), the era during which Reza Khan established himself as the head of the new ruling Pahlavi dynasty (1926-1979) in Iran, consolidating his absolute power.

5) The disappearance of the FKI under the joint assault of Stalinism and the Pahlavi military dictatorship (1931-1933).

6) The Arani Group (1934-1938).

7) The formative years of the Tudeh Party of Iran (1941-1943), which followed the forced abdication of Reza Khan after the joint occupation of Iran by the Anglo-Soviet troops in September 1941.

## 2. Sources and Historiography

Hindered by the unaccessibility of archival sources in Iran and the USSR and the difficulty of access to even contemporary printed sources, the study of this movement dates back only to the early 1970's. It needs to be furthered by research in the as yet inaccessible archives in the two countries mentioned above. The archives of the 'Adalat Party, the FKI, and the SSRI are to be found in the archives until recently held by the former Institutes of Marxism-Leninism (IML) in Moscow, Tiflis, and Baku. Other files may be found in the archives of the Foreign Ministry and the Interior Ministry (Secret Police) in Iran (now apparently all transferred to Iran's National Archives Organization).<sup>6</sup>

As regards memoirs, those concerning the 'Adalat and the FKI, if existing at all, may have been deposited at the IML in Baku, Tiflis and, possibly, Moscow. For the Arani Group period and the HTI formative

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of this movement, see C. Chaqueri, *The Birth of the Trauma: Britain, Soviet Russia and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-1921* (Pittsburgh, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Two recent documentaries by young Iranian researchers have been published on the basis of these archives and personal interviews: K. Bayat and M. Tafreshi (eds.), *Khâterât Dorân-i Separi-shodeh, 1299--1329* (Teheran, 1991); K. Bayat (ed.), *Fa'âliyathâ-yi Komonisti dar Dowreh-yi Reza Shah, 1300-1310* (Teheran, 1992).



years, several memoirs have only recently become available.<sup>7</sup> Their quality is, however, very much affected by subsequent events in the lives of their authors and in recent Iranian history. No complete bibliography of the Iranian Communist movement is as yet available. What is accessible is scattered throughout in Soviet bibliographies on Iran. For the Comintern publications regarding Iran, the best available source is still *L'Internationale Communiste et les Pays Coloniaux, 1919-1935* by Enrica Collotti-Pischel and Chiara Robertazzi.<sup>8</sup>

To date the two Persian and Anglo-Franco-German series edited by Cosroe Chaqueri, in twenty-one volumes<sup>9</sup> and eleven volumes<sup>10</sup> respectively, are the most complete collections of documents. Here most of the scattered material in western government archives as well as the material available so far from the Soviet Union and Iran have been published. Almost all the programmatic documents issued by the FKI can be found in the two series. They pertain to the two FKI congresses (held in summer 1920 and fall 1927) as well as to the program adopted by the "second" Central Committee of the FKI in 1921.<sup>11</sup> Access to the Russian archives containing, *inter alia*, the decisions of the FKI plenums between 1921 and 1931 would lead to a clearer picture.

### 3. From the 'Adâlat Party to the FKI

The development of the 'Adâlat Party and its successor, the FKI,<sup>12</sup> is associated with the rise of Iran's revolutionary, anti-colonial movements after the First World War and their defeat under the military dictatorship led by Reza Khan.

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<sup>7</sup> Nosratollah Jahanshahlou-Afshar, *Ma va Bigânegân. Sargozasht* (Düsseldorf, 1982); Anvar Khâneh-i, *Panjah va Seh Nafar* (Teheran, 1983), and *Forsat-i Bozorg-i az Dast Rafteh* (Teheran, 1984); E. Tabari, *Kazhrâheh* (Teheran, 1987); Iradj Eskandary, *Khâterât-i Siasi*, ed. by Babak Amirkhosrowi and Fereydoun Azarnour, 2 vols., (Paris, 1987 and 1988); Ardeshir Avanesian, *Khâterât, 1320-1326*, ed. by Babak Amirkhosrowi and Fereydoun Azarnour (Paris, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Paris, etc., 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Cosroe Chaqueri (ed.), *Historical Documents: The Workers', Social-Democratic, and Communist Movement in Iran*, 21 vols., (in Persian; Florence and Teheran, 1970-1990), esp. vols. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20 and 21 (microfilmed, The J. Regenstein Library, Middle East Division, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Cosroe Chaqueri (Koshrow Shakeri) (ed.), *History of the Labour Movement in Iran*, 11 vols.: I: *La Social-Démocratie en Iran. Articles et Documents* (Florence, 1979); II-V: *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran (a documentary history)*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Florence, 1978); VI: *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran* (Florence, 1979); VII: A. Sultanzade, *Politiische Schriften* (Florence, 1975); VIII: A. Sultanzade, *Ecrits Economiques* (Florence, 1979); IX: *The Revolutionary Movement in Iran vs Great Britain and Soviet Russia, 1914-1932* (Florence, 1979); X-XI: *Challenging the Establishment: the Iranian Left, 1905-1983*, 2 vols., (Clifton, N.J., 1992).

<sup>11</sup> See Chaqueri (ed.), *Historical Documents*, vols. 1 and 6, and *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran*. See also *Programma Persidskoj Kommunističeskoj Partii (bol' ševikov)* (s.l.[Resht?], s.d. [1920?]), German translation in Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, pp. 541ss., as well as the Haidar theses, *ibid.*, pp. 609, a modified version of the party program, published in 1921, *ibid.*, pp. 615ss., and of the party statute, *ibid.*, pp. 557ss. (all in German translation).

<sup>12</sup> For the history of the 'Adâlat Party and the FKI, see T.A. Ibrahimov (Šachin), *Iran Kommunist Partiasinin yaramasi* (Baku, 1963); Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, pp. 245ss.; and Cosroe Chaqueri, "Le Parti Communiste Iranien: Genèse, Développement, et Fin, 1916-1932" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris, Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1980), "Iranian Communism: the Early Phase, 1916-1938", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York, 1992), and *Victims of Faith: Iranian Communists and the Soviet Union, 1917-1940* (forthcoming).



Properly speaking, the first Iranian Communist organization, the 'Adalat Party, as noted above, was founded in Baku out of the remnants of the FEAM, by and among Iranian immigrant workers. In consequence of the disintegration of the country's traditional economy under the colonial onslaught, the Iranian immigrant workers' community in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire had grown at the turn of the century to hundreds of thousands, some 15 to 20% of the total male population of Iran's northern provinces. 'Adalat worked in close conjunction with the Caucasian-Muslim "branch" of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks), the *Himmat* (Determination/Endeavour). Having taken part in the Russian Civil War, the 'Adalat was an early enthusiast and strong supporter of the Communist International (CI).<sup>13</sup> It joined the CI and was present at its First Congress in 1919. It depended on the Comintern not only intellectually, but also organizationally and financially. In 1920 members of the 'Adalat Party formed the FKI; the FKI's founding congress took place on 23-25 June 1920 at Anzali.<sup>14</sup>

As the organization of militant workers from Iran, subjected to the harsh material and psychological conditions of immigrant life and seasoned by the revolutionary class struggle in the Caucasus, the 'Adalat naturally tended to belong to the most radical wing of the Caucasian political scene. As such it opted for a radical social program, which it wished to implement inside Iran. Declaring itself a "proletarian party", the 'Adalat stated in its first program that it would fight for "liberty and the welfare of humanity in a classless society". It nevertheless would admit into its ranks non-workers provided they were prepared to fight for the interests of workers and peasants. It wanted to install a "popular, democratic power" before proceeding to nationalize all means of production for the benefit of the working people. Furthermore, the 'Adalat said it would support the struggle against Russian Czarism, for it believed that the liberation of the Russian working people would further the cause of liberty and democracy in Iran.<sup>15</sup>

While the 'Adalat survived precariously and illegally throughout its existence until the establishment of Soviet power in the south-western Caucasus, the FKI, operating inside Iran, though never considered a fully legal party, enjoyed, in the first years of its activity, that is up to 1925, a certain "tolerance" by the rising military dictatorship, and could pursue its activities more or less openly. It was in this period that the FKI collaborated, though rather unilaterally, with the radical wing of the democratic movement in the country.

On the basis of the available sources, it is difficult to acquire a clear picture of the social composition of the party's membership. What little evidence there is, indicates that the membership of the 'Adalat as well as, initially, of the FKI, was of working-class origin. The "domestication" of the FKI inside the country paradoxically tended to attract to the organization members of the intelligentsia with "petty-bourgeois" backgrounds.

The election of the leadership seems to have been carried out quite democratically, at least until mid-1920. This situation changed after the involvement of the FKI in the revolutionary movement in the Caspian provinces during the summer of 1920 when it entered into a coalition with the *Jangali* movement. The Caucasian Bureau (Kavburo) of the Russian Communist Party, under Stalin's influence, imposed a "second" Central Committee (CC) on the FKI at the end of the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East (September 1920), because of the differences of policy emerging within the party, "dissolving" the "first" CC elected at the party's

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<sup>13</sup> According to Avetis (Mikailian) Sultanzade, in 1918/19 the party had ca. 6,000 members in the Soviet territories. See Sultan Zade "The Communist Party of Iran", *The Communist International*, no. 13 (1920), pp. 104s., and *Problemy sovremennoj Persii* (Moscow, 1922), p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> See "Der erste Kongreß der persischen Kommunisten der Partei 'Adalat'", *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, no. 14 (1921), pp. 225-230, and also Avetis (Mikailian) Sultanzade, "K s'ezdu Persidskoj Kommunističeskoj Partii", *Kommunist* (Baku), 5 June 1920, and "The Communist Party of Iran", pp. 104s. According to Sultanzade 48 delegates participated in the congress, among them "representatives of the Communists of Persia, Turkestan, and the Caucasus". According to other sources the number of participants was 71 (among them 27 delegates from Kurdistan, Daghistan, Georgia, and Baku): 51 delegates entitled to vote, 11 delegates in an advisory capacity, and 9 guests; 48 mandates were confirmed. Ibrahimov (Šachin), *Iran Kommunist Partijasinin yaramasi*, p. 196; Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, p. 255. Sultanzade claimed that "In Persia itself, according to approximate calculations, we have about 10,000 members of the Party, dispersed throughout the whole country."

<sup>15</sup> See Chaqueri, "Le Parti Communiste Iranien", ch. III, and *Victims of Faith*, ch. II.



congress at Anzali.<sup>16</sup> It seems that henceforth the leadership of the organization was chosen under the direct "guidance" of the Russian CP and in conjunction with the Comintern.

The FKI was, from its very inception, in contact with the Russian CP and its subsidiaries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, most notably the *Himmat* and the *Kavburo*. The transformation of the '*Adalat*' into the Iranian Communist Party was accomplished under the auspices of the Comintern Central Eastern Department, if not also under those of the section of the Russian CP dealing with the Muslim republics springing up in the territories of the defunct Russian Empire. The early generative link, both organizationally and personally, with the Russian Bolsheviks left a lasting impression upon the FKI and its further factional developments. Thus, at its founding congress at Anzali in June 1920, two opposing factions took shape: the "Left", led by Avetis (Mikailian) Sultanzade,<sup>17</sup> aligned with the radical wing of the Comintern leadership, and the "Right", associated with the name of another Communist leader, Haidar Khan Amoghli (Tariverdiev),<sup>18</sup> whose faction was under the powerful influence of Stalin's *Kavburo* led by Serge Ordzhonikidze.

As to the FKI's Bolshevization, it should be noted that it was "innate", as the birth of the FKI was closely linked with Bolshevik organizational activities in the southern Caucasus. Moreover, the party was later associated with the Soviet grand strategy for the East, in that it was considered, albeit only briefly, as the vanguard for the eastward extension of world revolution under the auspices of the Comintern.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. ICP's Revolutionary Phase: Involvement in the SSRI

As the Civil War in Russia drew to an end and the CI was founded, there began, at least for the internationalist Communists, the phase of the internationalization of the revolution. To this group belonged many eastern Communists, among whom were to be found also the leaders of the '*Adalat*'. They advocated the extension of the revolution eastwards, particularly in the light of the successes of the revolutionary movement under Kuchek Khan in Iran's Caspian provinces.

It was with this in mind that the '*Adalat*' launched a campaign for the creation of an Iranian Red Army in the Caucasus and Central Asia, where many Iranian immigrants still worked and had joined the ranks of the revolutionary movement. By the time the White Russians had been chased out of Soviet territories, the '*Adalat*' was ready for a fully-fledged operation in Iran. When the Soviet forces, in pursuit of Denikin's White forces, arrived at Iran's Caspian port of Anzali on 18 May 1920, detachments of the Iranian Red Army were also landing on the Iranian shores.

It was through the mediation of the commander of the Soviet Caspian Fleet, Raskolnikov, and the Caucasian Bolshevik leader, Serge Ordzhonikidze, that the Iranian Communists of the '*Adalat*' and the *Jangali* revolutionaries under Kuchek Khan were brought together in a coalition, declaring the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran on 5 June 1920. In spite of the '*Adalat*'s Communist program, the parties agreed that no Communist propaganda, particularly anti-religious propaganda would be disseminated, and no extreme measures would be taken.<sup>20</sup> A revolutionary government composed of Kuchek Khan's collaborators was created under the leadership of a Revolutionary Committee (Revkom), whose members included both Soviet and Iranian Communists. The apparent aim of the Revkom for the immediate future was the capture of the Iranian capital with a view to installing government of the SSRI there. Whether this was also the policy that Moscow was pursuing is not quite obvious.

Whatever Moscow's intention may have been, dissension soon developed between the '*Adalat*'

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, pp. 304ss.; for the composition of the "first" CC, see *ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>17</sup> See Cosroe Chaqueri (ed.), *Avetis Sultanzade: the Forgotten Revolutionary. Life and Works* (Florence, 1986), and "The Forgotten Revolutionary Theoretician of Iran", *Iranian Studies*, nos. 2-3 (1984).

<sup>18</sup> See A.I. Shamideh, *Gaydar [Haidar] Khan Amoghli* (Baku, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> See Chaqueri, "*Le Parti Communiste Iranien*", and also Chaqueri (ed.) *The Revolutionary Movement in Iran vs Great Britain and Soviet Russia*.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed description, see Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan*, pp. 279ss., and Chaqueri, *The Birth of the Trauma*.



Communists plus a few of Kuchek Khan's radical colleagues on the one hand, and the *Jangali* revolutionaries headed by Kuchek Khan on the other. Apparently the bone of contention, exploited by the reactionary forces and their British mentors, was the anti-religious propaganda which the *Jangali* revolutionaries claimed was being spread by some Communists. But there is no doubt that the agrarian question was the real issue which finally led to the break-up of the revolutionary coalition, the retreat of Kuchek Khan into the forests and a Communist "coup" bringing about the creation of a "purely Communist regime".

While the 'Adalat Communist leadership under Sultanzade adamantly insisted on the implementation of an agrarian reform as a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the revolutionary movement,<sup>21</sup> the *Jangali* revolutionaries claimed that such a reform would be counter-productive and could not be successfully undertaken until after the capture of Teheran and the seizure of power in the country. Whatever the cause of its failure, the coalition did not last very long and the various attempts over the next fourteen months to mend the fractured coalition came to naught. The movement was finally defeated for three reasons: a) its internal dissensions; b) the help given by the British to the central government in Teheran with reorganizing the Iranian military and implementing the February 1921 coup d'état under the strong man Reza Khan; c) Soviet rapprochement with the Teheran government, agreeing not only to withdraw support from the revolutionary forces and the FKI, but also to prevent them from carrying out their revolutionary activities. The Soviet ambassador, Theodore Rothstein, played a decisive role in the dismantling of this revolutionary movement.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. From Revolutionary Communism to Reformist Democracy

As noted above, at the first congress of the 'Adalat, held in Anzali in the midst of revolutionary activity while the party was a partner in the SSRI government, the party split into two clearly marked factions: revolutionary Communists and Communists who advocated a moderate line for Iran. While the former followed the leadership of Sultanzade, a well-educated Marxist theoretician of Armenian peasant descent from Iran, the latter followed the guidelines of Caucasian Communists. This latter group finally came under the leadership of Haidar Khan, a veteran Social-Democratic activist. In September 1920 Haidar became the chairman of the "second" CC, "chosen" for the FKI at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East.<sup>23</sup>

The conflicts mainly concerned two issues: the agrarian question and collaboration with the non-Communist forces in the country. The revolutionary faction opted for an immediate agrarian revolution and an outright struggle against all those who opposed a radical change of regime in Teheran. The moderate faction called for postponing the agrarian revolution and collaboration even with the *khans* (tribal leaders and landlords) until such time as the Teheran government was overthrown. While the official program adopted at the party congress had called for the eventual sovietization of the country, compromise resolutions demanded the struggle against: a) British imperialism; b) the Qajar shahs; and c) the great landlords.<sup>24</sup> The compromise resolutions did not prevent the split in the party leadership, nor did they facilitate collaboration with the *Jangali* revolutionaries within the SSRI coalition.

The split also became apparent in the Soviet and Comintern authorities. While the Kavburo sided with the moderate faction under Haidar Khan, the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) supported the revolutionary faction led by Sultanzade. These differences lasted until an ECCI resolution was adopted in summer 1921 calling for the re-unification of the two CCs of the FKI. It was implemented only after the mysterious death of Haidar

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Sultanzade's article "Agrarnij vopros v Persii", *Novyj Vostok*, no. 1 (1922).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis see Chaqueri, *The Birth of the Trauma*.

<sup>23</sup> For the 1920-1921 programs of the "first" CC, see Chaqueri (ed.), *Historical Documents*, vol. 6 (2nd edition, Teheran, 1979), pp. 101-102, and vol. 1 (4th edition, Teheran, 1990), p. 68; for the "second" CC's position, see *ibid.*, pp. 43-59. Cf. also C.L. Agaev and V.N. Plastun, "Iz istorii razrabotki programmy i taktiki Iranskoj Kommunističeskoj Partii v 1920-1921", *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 3 (1976).

<sup>24</sup> Sultanzade, *Ecrits Economiques*, p. 152.

Khan in the fall of that year.<sup>25</sup>

With the defeat of the coalition and the SSRI in the aftermath of the signing of, on the one hand, the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement in the spring of 1921 and, on the other, the Friendship Treaty between the Teheran and Moscow governments, the FKI abandoned the revolutionary platform and settled for a semi-legal status within the post-coup d'état Iranian political situation. The party seriously occupied itself with the task of organizing a working-class base inside the country, and particularly in the major cities, and launched the newspaper *Haqiqat* (Truth) as its unofficial organ as well as other journals.<sup>26</sup> This precarious semi-legal status lasted for nearly four years, during which the moderate party leadership (Sultanzade having been detained in various positions in Soviet Russia<sup>27</sup>) flirted with Iran's dictator Reza Khan Pahlavi, whom the Comintern writings referred to as the representative of the national bourgeoisie.<sup>28</sup> The flirtation turned out to be of no avail since by this time Iran's new dictator felt strong enough to do away with all his opponents completely, Communist or not, and, in 1925, to ascend the imperial throne.

The destruction of the party under the new dictatorial conditions helped the radical leadership to come forward at the appropriate time; when the Soviet party and the Comintern were beginning to turn against the "Right", led by Bukharin. In fall 1927, the second party congress was organized in Uroumiyeh in north-western Iran.<sup>29</sup> The radicals, prevailing at the congress, used the occasion to criticize and discard the former leadership, whom they held responsible for the party's flirtation with Reza Khan and the ensuing paralysis of the organization.<sup>30</sup>

Given the new international and domestic situation, however, the party did not revert to the revolutionary policies adopted at the first congress in Anzali. On the basis of an extensive analysis of Iran's position within the new world system, and taking into account the new coalition of internal forces, the party congress called for, not the sovietization of the country, but the establishment of a revolutionary democratic government under the leadership of the proletarian party.<sup>31</sup>

In conjunction with this new program, the new radical leadership undertook the task of, not only mobilizing a greater number of workers and peasants, but also an increasing number from among the educated youth, who could be trained for future leadership. This formed the basis for propagandistic and organizational activities among Iranian students sent to Western Europe for higher education. The front organization that was assigned this task was the Revolutionary Republican Party of Iran (*Ferqeh-yi Jomhuri-yi Enqelâbi-yi Iran*; FJRI), which published the newspaper *Paykâr* (Struggle). This journal and the party's theoretical organ *Setâreh-yi Sorkh* (Red Star), which were also distributed clandestinely outside the country, seem to have had some success in drawing some of their targets to the party. Some future leaders of the HTI, including their mentor Dr. Arani, were attracted to Marxism through these efforts. The task of the party at this time was a relentless attack against the new dynasty headed by Reza Khan.

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<sup>25</sup> For the details, see Shakeri, "Le Parti Communiste Iranien", ch. IV.

<sup>26</sup> See below.

<sup>27</sup> in 1921 he was appointed head of the Middle East department of the Soviet Foreign Commissariat.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Irandust (Osetrov), "Le bloc de la finance internationale en Perse", *La Correspondance Internationale*, 1925, no. 2; A. Sadovski, "La situation politique en Perse", *ibid.*, 1925, no. 100.

<sup>29</sup> A. Sultanzade, "Der zweite Parteitag der KP des Iran", *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, no. 51 (1927), pp. 2517-2523.

<sup>30</sup> For the modified appraisal of Reza Khan after the second FKI congress, see *The Communist International between the Vth and VIth Congresses* (London, 1928), pp. 406-410.

<sup>31</sup> For the documents of the second congress, see: Chaqueri (ed.) *Historical Documents*, vols. 1 (4th edition.) and 10; and *Challenging the Establishment*, vol. 1. Cf. also A. Sultanzade, "The Lines of Development of Modern Persia", *The Communist International*, 1928, no. 1, pp. 9-13.

## 5. The Party's Press and Mass Activities

One of the first acts of the 'Adalat was to create its own press that was to become, next to public and group meetings, its main instrument of agitation among Iranian workers in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Thus, the 'Adalat published *Hurriyat* (Freedom) and *Bayraq-i 'Adalat* (The Standard of Justice) during its short period of freedom in the Caucasus, while the FKI put out *Enqelâb-i Sorkh* (Red Revolution) and *Iran-i Sorkh* (Red Iran) during its involvement in the SSRI, *Haqiqat, Kâr* (Labour), and a few others between 1921 and 1924 when it enjoyed a semi-legal status, and *Paykâr* and *Setâreh-yi Sorkh* during its years of exile (1929-1932) in Germany. The Arani Group published *Donya* (The Universe) legally in 1934-1935 under the conditions of tight military censorship, while the HTI published during its formative years (1941-1943) two important dailies, *Mardum* (The People) and *Rahbar* (The Leader).<sup>32</sup>

Organizationally, the 'Adalat and the FKI seem to have been no different from the structural model of the Leninist parties, although, once again, the inaccessibility of the party archives does not permit us to know any structural details. Although the HTI was apparently organized on Leninist principles, it seems that personal rivalries among its leaders, *inter alia*, prevented it from functioning as a tightly "democratically centralized" party; this "laxity", however, did not make the party any more democratic.

For reasons related to Iran's geo-political position and also the country's continuous occupation before, during and after the First World War, the FKI was sensitive to and preoccupied with the question of war. Indeed, as soon as the Russian Civil War broke out, the newly formed 'Adalat engaged in a serious effort to recruit Iranians living in the territories of the Russian Empire for the Bolshevik cause. The FKI literature during the 1920's and early 1930's, too, was permeated with the issue of an "imperialist war" against the USSR.<sup>33</sup> With the same degree of intensity, the FKI was preoccupied with the colonial (i.e. foreign domination) question, which, too, had remained an unsolved issue ever since the emergence of the democratic movement in the country during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1909. While the solution of the agrarian question, the other important unsolved issue, had been mainly frustrated by internal reaction, the colonial question had become a more crucial issue, now that the British were exerting a greater influence on Iranian political life, after the disappearance of Czarism. Thus, the party journals were replete with anti-colonial articles and studies of the peasant and agrarian questions bearing directly on the development of the workers' struggle for the development of trade union rights and the seizure of power.

*Per contra*, the national question appeared to be the least important one to the party. In fact, there is little evidence that the Iranian Communist movement ever dealt with the nationalities' question in a serious manner. Contrary to the "first" CC, which explicitly recognized the existence and the rights of various ethnic groups in the country, the "second" CC affirmed that Iran was a "united and indivisible" country.<sup>34</sup> But neither CC did anything about the issue. The reason may be that the sense of being Iranian (in cultural terms) has always been very strong, and that at this time the ethnic problem was not a pressing issue in the country. The nationality issue did become critical in the 1945/46 crisis in the two autonomous governments in Azerbeidjan and Kurdistan, in consequence of the serious neglect to which the two Iranian regions had been exposed under the first Pahlavi rule.

As for the industrial workers, whose number was rather insignificant,<sup>35</sup> the FKI exerted ever expanding efforts to organize them in trade unions. These efforts led to the creation in 1921 of a national federation, a "mass" organization named the United Council of Iranian Trade Unions (*Shorâ-yi Motahedeh-yi Ettehâdiyeh-hâ-*

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<sup>32</sup> See Chaqueri (ed.), *Historical Documents*, vols. 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, and 17, and also Chaqueri, "Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran".

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, A. Sultan-Sade, "Die Vorbereitungen Englands für den Krieg gegen die UdSSR und die Rolle Persiens", *Die Kommunistische Internationale*, 1931, no. 41, pp. 1465-1477, and "Persia an Outpost of British Imperialism. War Preparations on the Near-Eastern Frontiers of the Soviet Union", *International Press Correspondence*, 1931, no. 25.

<sup>34</sup> See note 23. For the stand of the second congress in 1927 see C. Chaqueri (ed.), *Challenging the Establishment*, vol. 1.

<sup>35</sup> See Chaqueri (ed.), *The Condition of the Working Class*.



yi *Kârgari-yi Iran*; SMEKI), which was immediately affiliated to the Profintern.<sup>36</sup> The trade unions under Communist influence were active, not only in the modern industries, such as textiles and petroleum, but also in such traditional crafts and services as bakers, tailors and transport. It is significant that during this period the FKI gave Iranian workers sustained experience in building labour unions. Several important labour strikes led by FKI and SMEKI cadres shook the regime as well as the British oil company in southern Iran, causing them to take further serious, repressive measures against the workers, including the despatch of warships to the Iranian port of Abadan.

The only other front organization the FKI created was the FJFI. It was founded in 1926 and run by the party's younger members abroad. It was mainly active among Iranian students in Western Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Being repressed at that time not only inside Iran, but also in Soviet Russia, the FKI even during the years 1931/32, i.e. on the eve of the Nazis' seizure of power, paid little attention to the Fascist danger. The sole issue the party's theoretical organ had the chance to deal with was the "conspiracy of the industrial party" in Soviet Russia. It is interesting to note that until their final suppression in 1932 FKI journals never indulged in any condemnation of the various Bolshevik factions opposed to or repressed by Stalin. Indeed, the FKI was reproached, and repressed in the USSR, for its "leftist deviations and anti-Leninism" as early as 1932.<sup>38</sup> In Iran itself the existing repression was further intensified by anti-Socialist legislation in 1931.

This brief sketch would not be complete without reference to some other issues that the FKI dealt with during its relatively short life span.

Firstly, the efforts of the moderate wing of the party to set up coalitions with social-democratic and democratic forces in the country during the twenties were directed at weakening the hold of reactionary forces as well as at pushing through reforms in various areas. As noted above, this policy was, however, seriously criticized and discarded at the second party congress in 1927, on the eve of the radical turnabout of the Comintern in Summer 1928.

Secondly, the radical members of the party leadership, though removed under Stalin from their positions in the party apparatus, did not hesitate to demonstrate their opposition to the foundation of the new Pahlavi dynasty. They emphasized their republican preferences during public meetings as well as through the FJFI. The radicalization of the party after its second congress helped to revive the shattered party organizations both inside and outside Iran, but failed to bring about the desired results.

## 6. The Arani Group

The brutal suppression of the FKI in 1931/32 inside Iran led to the creation in 1934 of the Arani Group (also known as the Group of Fifty-three), whose Marxist nucleus managed to publish legally its scientific review *Donya*. Although the circumstances of the creation and subsequent "discovery" (1936) and suppression (1938) of the group as a "Communist conspiracy" against the Pahlavi State still needs to be further elucidated, it is almost certain that Arani organized his group in conjunction with the leading members of the left wing of the FKI who had been deprived of political activity in their Moscow exile after 1932 and that the suppression of the group by the Pahlavi regime was assisted by a "leak" to the political police from the Soviet agent Abdussamad Kambakhsh, who had infiltrated the group. This may have been due to the dissatisfaction of the Soviet leaders with Arani's position regarding both Iranian issues and Soviet and Comintern questions. Only the material in the Russian archives can shed further light on this.

Dr. Taqi Arani, a university professor, had been won over to Marxism during his student days in the Weimar Republic by members of the new leadership of the FKI; later he set himself the task of attracting

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<sup>36</sup> See A. Sultanzade, "Le Mouvement syndicale en Perse", *L'Internationale Syndicale Rouge*, April-May 1922.

<sup>37</sup> See Chaqueri (ed.), *Historical Documents*, vol. 6, and *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran*.

<sup>38</sup> A series of articles by a Stalinist Iran "expert", G.C. Gel'bras (using the pen-name Randjbar), vehemently attacked both Sultanzade, the party theoretician, and the party organ as "anti-Leninist". See Randjbar (i.e. G.C. Gel'bras), "Tov. Sultanzade kak vyrazitel' melkobur'zuznovo vlijaniya v voprosach persidskoj revoljucii", *Revoljucionnyj Vostok*, nos. 1 (1932), 2 (1933), and 2 (1934); and Chaqueri (ed.), *Victims of Faith*.



disgruntled students to his Marxist circle, with the aim of building cadres for the revival of the Communist Party under better conditions. He did not operate on a strict organizational basis, but led a loose group of adherents, who were divided into small study circles. The nucleus of the group around Arani consisted of no more than three or four young Communists. The main instrument of the group was its scientific monthly *Donya*, which survived no more than a year and a half. Despite claims to the contrary, there is no evidence that the Arani Group received instructions from the Comintern or was even in contact with it.

### 7. The Formation of the Tudeh Party

The legacy of the group and the survival of its members (except its leader Arani who was killed in prison in 1940) led to the creation of the HTI in fall 1941, that is one month after the forced abdication of Reza Shah when Iran was occupied by the Allies. There is now little doubt that the creation of the HTI as a "democratic front", with a group of Communist cadres as its nucleus, was a plan proposed by the Comintern. Although some HTI founders strive to play down this aspect of the party's birth, there is enough evidence to make such a conclusion highly credible.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the FKI (and its forerunner the *'Adalat*), the HTI began as a legal organization and remained one until 5 February 1949. It became a mass organization (notably after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad) whose membership extended to vast strata of non-working class people as well. The HTI's leadership had hardly any members with a working-class background. They were drawn mainly from the ranks of the aristocracy, clergy and bureaucracy. Also, unlike the FKI, the HTI managed, by drawing on overt Soviet support and on its vast membership, to enter Parliament.

The program of the HTI was based on the resolutions and recommendations of the Seventh Comintern Congress. It thus limited itself to democratic demands. Consequently, the party sought collaboration and coalition with, not only "democratic" forces, including such powerful landlords as Premier Qavam during the Azerbaijan crisis in the summer of 1946, but also pro-British circles during the war. These policies, and its overt support for Soviet economic concessions in Iran, seriously undermined confidence in the HTI's attachment to Iran's national interests and isolated it from the mainstream democratic movement in the country.<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

As noted above, the revolutionary wing of the Iranian Communist movement was close to the central nucleus of the Comintern in the first years of the latter's existence. Nonetheless, it had a more independent spirit than is usually the case with Communist parties. As a result the FKI lost its place at the center of activities, for it found itself in opposition to Soviet policy and Comintern directives, particularly as the latter organization increasingly fell under the control of the Stalinist current in the USSR.

It is worth emphasizing that, despite the fact that the FKI was the Iranian "offspring" of the Comintern, it increasingly found itself in opposition to the mother organization and was consequently subjected to most brutal suppression by the Soviets (1932-1938). On the other hand, the HTI, created principally by the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy during an intense period of the Second World War, when Nazi influence in the Middle East was on the rise, was increasingly instrumentalized by Soviet foreign policy and yet developed little interior opposition, at least not on theoretical or political grounds, and not until several years after the end of the War.

On the whole, the instrumentalization of the Iranian Communist movement by the Comintern accomplished the eradication of the influences of Western Marxism, introduced into Iran by another current in Iranian Social-Democracy (namely the Social-Democratic Group of Tabriz), and the consolidation of the roots of Russian Marxism, first planted in Iran by Iranian workers influenced by their experience as immigrants in the Caucasus.

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<sup>39</sup> See C. Chaqueri, "I. Eskandari and the Tudeh Party of Iran", *Central Asian Survey*, no. 4 (1988).

<sup>40</sup> For the HTI, see Ervend Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, 1982); Sepeher Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley, 1966), and the memoirs of Tudeh leaders mentioned in note 7. None of these works is, however, devoid of ideological bias.