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# **SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION**

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*For Susan and Arlen Kian*

nationalization of oil. However, the ensuing crisis and conflicts prompted divisions within their ranks. A minority continued to support Prime Minister Mosaddegh's National Front throughout the 1950s, including Ayatollahs Taleghani, Sayyed Abolfazl Zanjani, and Sayyed Hadi Milani. Others deserted to the royalist camp, notably Ayatollah Kashani, influential speaker of the Majles from 1952 to 1953 (*New York Times*, April 16, 1953). He had joined Mosaddegh's National Front and was active in the struggle to nationalize oil, but he later opposed the prime minister's request for emergency powers to resolve the country's crisis. Kashani argued that although Iranians had fought against Great Britain in order to improve their conditions, Mosaddegh actually worsened Iran's economic situation. In one meeting he asked the prime minister rhetorically, "Our economy is bankrupt, our villages are destroyed, our sons have become communists, and our schools have taken red colors. What are you doing?" (*Kayhan*, September 14, 1953). Regarding the Shah, Kashani told an Egyptian reporter, "Our king is different from [Egypt's King] Farouk. . . . The Iranian king is neither corrupt or greedy like Farouk, nor a dictatorial autocrat. The Shah is an educated and wise man" (*Ettelaat*, March 30, 1953).

Toward the end of 1952, in an attempt to obstruct the passage of Mosaddegh's policies, Kashani refused to attend and preside over the Majles. In early January 1953, when Mosaddegh requested an extension of his emergency powers in order to resolve the country's crisis, Kashani refused to go along, asserting that as long as he remained in the Majles he would prevent the passage of such bills. In February, the Shah was pressured by Mosaddegh to leave the country for a period of time, but Kashani intervened and prevented his departure. In April, Kashani refused to convene the Majles to pass the report of the Eight-Member Committee designed to curb the monarch's power, which liberals argued interfered unconstitutionally in all aspects of Iranian society.

During the crucial confrontation over the fate of parliament in 1953, Kashani opposed Mosaddegh's referendum, labeling it illegal and dictatorial. When the Majles recessed at the end of July to await the voting, he invited opposition politicians to anti-Mosaddegh meetings in his home. Two days before the voting, Kashani led the right-wing opposition in a call for a boycott of the referendum (*Ettelaat*, August 1, 1953). It is said that during the coup d'état that followed he helped Ayatollah Behbahani organize gangs of hoodlums who, along with segments of the army, looted National Front headquarters, the homes of the prime minister's supporters, and even the house of Mosaddegh himself (Cottam 1979:154–156; Akhavi

1980:69). After the coup d'état, Kashani praised General Zahedi, the new prime minister, for his willingness to sacrifice whatever was necessary to defend the country (*Kayhan*, October 2, 1953).

Ayatollah Behbahani also consistently opposed Mosaddegh and supported the royalist position. He, too, condemned Mosaddegh's referendum on the Majles and played an important part in the coup d'état against the prime minister. While abroad, the Shah sent a telegram to Behbahani thanking him for the kindness the Iranian people had revealed toward him and the constitution. He also asked that the entire nation obey General Zahedi as his new prime minister. Ayatollah Behbahani responded by expressing his happiness over the Shah's health and saying he looked forward to the monarch's return (*Ettelaat*, August 22, 1953).

Ayatollah Khomeini was not politically active at the time, but disliked the National Front's disrespect for Islam. On one occasion, Mosaddegh's supporters had put a pair of glasses on a dog, taken it to the Majles, and named it "ayatollah." They then toured the dog through the streets. Speaking later of that event, Khomeini said that he had predicted, "Mosaddegh will be slapped; and it was not long before he was slapped; had he survived, he would have slapped Islam" (Khomeini 1983, 15:15).

Nonactivist clergy also supported the Shah. They were led by the most preeminent Marja'a Taghliid in the country, Ayatollah Sayyed-Mohammad Hossein Boroujerdi. During the nationalization of oil, he and royalist members of the Majles held demonstrations in the Qom seminary, Madreseh-e Faizieh, rejecting nationalization as a violation of property and contrary to the laws of Islam (Nategh 1982). In July 1952, during the conflict between Mosaddegh and the Shah over control of the army, the conservative clerics of Qom sent their representative to Tehran to support the Shah (Nategh 1982). In the view of these clerics, Mosaddegh was moving the country toward communism. When the monarch left the country on August 16, 1953, Boroujerdi sent him a telegram that read, "Return because Shiism and Islam need you. You are the Shiite King." The Shah sent Ayatollah Boroujerdi a telegram from Rome, declaring his intention to return. Boroujerdi responded by sending the Shah another telegram, hoping the monarch's arrival would effect "religious progress, bring glory to Islam, and comfort to Moslems" (*Ettelaat*, August 25, 1953). Shortly after the coup d'état on the religious holiday of Aid-e Ghadier, Ayatollah Boroujerdi telegraphed his congratulations to General Zahedi, wishing the new prime minister luck in the great responsibility he had accepted to serve Islam (*Ettelaat*, September 1, 1953).

The clergy's political position was strengthened after the ouster of Mossaddegh. They embarked upon an anti-Baha'i campaign, demanding that Baha'is be purged from government offices, their religious properties confiscated, and Baha'i preaching prohibited. For several weeks, the state-run radio ran a special daily program in which Mohammad Taghi Falsavi, an influential religious preacher, condemned Baha'is.<sup>2</sup> The army occupied the Baha'i center in Tehran, where General Batmanghelich, chief of staff of the armed forces, personally participated in the destruction of the center's dome.

## THE WHITE REVOLUTION AND THE CLERGY

Relations between the state and the clergy changed in December 1959 when the Shah proposed land reform. Ayatollah Boroujerdi expressed dissatisfaction with the land reform bill drafted by the government, but he died in March 1961, before the proposed reform was enacted (McLahlan 1968:690). In May 1961, the Shah dissolved the Majles, which was dominated by landlords, and ordered the government to implement a series of reforms, including land reform. In October 1962, the government approved a law to form local councils throughout the country. The same law gave women the right to vote. It did not require voters or candidates to adhere to Islam, nor did it state that elected councillors must take their oath of office on the Koran (Bakhash 1984:24). Most clerics viewed the law as contrary to Islam. In support of their views they could point to the constitution of 1906, which prohibited any law that was against Islam. The clerics began to protest the law by sending telegrams and petitions to Prime Minister Asadollah Alam (served 1962–1964). The prime minister attempted to ignore the protests until November 1, when the clergy called for nationwide prayer and protest. In the early hours of that day, the government capitulated and contacted the religious leaders in Qom and Tehran, stating that the local councils law had been suspended (Bakhash 1984:25).

The government did not, however, do away with the land reform and women's franchise. In January 1963, the government held a national referendum to ratify what was later called the White Revolution. After the voting, the government claimed that the reforms had received the overwhelming support of the people.

The clergy's response to the reforms was divided. Unlike the conflicts of 1953, this time only a small clerical minority with ties to the government

supported the Shah, including Ayatollah Mahdavi, Allamah Vahidi, and the Imam Jumah of Tehran (Akhavi 1980:103). Most of the clergy opposed the Shah's reforms, although they were divided on some of the issues. The majority opposed both land reform and the vote for women. In some areas, especially Azerbaijan, Isfahan, and Kerman, the clergy were large landholders who stood to lose under the proposed reforms. Land belonging to mosques and religious institutions was also slated to be confiscated. For some clerics, including Ayatollahs Shariat-Madari and Mohammad Reza Golpaygani, women's franchise was unacceptable, and they specifically asked the Shah to withdraw this proposed reform. Other clergy, including Ayatollahs Taleghani, Zanjani, and Mahallati Shirazi, adopted a radical position. They criticized the Shah's dictatorship and the capitulation laws and advocated justice for the poor (Akhavi 1980:101). As for Ayatollah Khomeini, he vehemently opposed the regime's attack on Islam and the clergy. He denounced the Shah's referendum as contrary to the interests of the Iranian nation. In early June 1963, religious ceremonies of the month of Muharram became highly political and often turned into political protests. The government, threatened by the politicization of the religious processions, arrested Ayatollah Khomeini and a number of other clerics on June 5. Within a few hours, protests erupted in Tehran, Qom, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Kashan. Harsh repression demobilized the protesters, enhancing the power of the government and the Shah. As a result, the loose alliance between the monarch and the clergy broke apart, an alliance that had existed since the Shah first came to power during World War II.

In the years that followed, the Shah introduced a number of policies designed to undermine the status and influence of the clergy and strengthen his own position. In the early 1960s, clerical students, known as *tullab*, and teachers at religious educational establishments received monthly stipends from the Sahm-e Imam, a clerical fund. These stipends amounted to between 300 and 400 rials per month, though they sometimes ran as high as 1,000 rials. Following bureaucratic reforms in 1964, the stipends were abolished and replaced by financial assistance from the newly created Endowments Organization (Sazman-e Owghaf). The funds available through this organization were far less than clerical students had formerly received from religious sources; in 1973, for example, the stipend was only 228 rials per month (Akhavi 1980:140). Many clerical students were hard-pressed to survive in the face of declining financial support. The Endowments Organization also oversaw the disposition of religious establishments. Land

monarchy or an Islamic Republic. Voters could respond by indicating either yes or no. A number of political organizations boycotted the referendum, claiming it was "anti-democratic" because it did not give voters any real choice as the people had already overthrown the monarchy. Nevertheless, the vast majority—20,406,591 out of 22,800,000 eligible voters—voted in favor of an Islamic Republic. A few months later, in July, the Bazargan government nationalized the industrial assets of fifty-one of the wealthiest businessmen, many of whom had already fled the country (*Kayhan*, July 7, 1979).

The provisional government lasted for nine months and resigned in protest against "interferences" that made it impossible to continue to operate. Bazargan had made similar charges before on numerous occasions, but he did not actually quit until the students took over the American Embassy in November 1979. Khomeini then asked the Revolutionary Council to take charge of the operation of the government until the new Majles was elected in May 1980. The council was at that time composed of six clerics, including Ayatollahs Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Beheshti, Mahdavi-Kani, Mousavi-Ardebili, Dr. Mohammad Javad Bahonar and Hojjat Al-Eslams Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khameneh'i; and seven nonclerics, including Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, Dr. Abbas Shaybani, Sadegh Ghotb-Zadeh, Dr. Yadollah Sahabi, Ali Akbar Moienfar, Sadr, and Bazargan himself.

Although the clergy did not predominate within the government's formal structure, they controlled the nongovernmental organizations such as the Komitehs—the committees—and the armed Revolutionary Guard. These organizations had been formed soon after the monarchy's collapse to bring the country under control and were to have been either dissolved or incorporated into the government. On February 28, 1979, Khomeini stated that as soon as the government was in full control of the cities, the Komitehs should relinquish their power to the government and avoid interfering in government affairs (1983, 5:120). Popular criticism of the Komitehs and the Revolutionary Guards reached a peak after two Marxist sons of Ayatollah Taleghani were arrested for no apparent reason. In protest, Taleghani closed his office and vanished for a few days after securing the release of his sons. Large demonstrations protesting the arrests were organized by leftist groups. Finally, Khomeini asked Taleghani to return to public life, which he did. A few days later, Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, supreme commander of the Central Komiteh, announced that the Guard would be incorporated into the police after its unfit elements had been purged (*New York Times*, April 25, 1979). Neither the Komitehs nor the

Guard were dissolved, however. The Revolutionary Guard became a strong force and played an important role in future conflicts. Unlike the army, which was composed largely of conscripts who could prove unreliable under certain conditions, the Guard was staffed by full-time, permanent personnel who had joined voluntarily, some for economic reasons, others out of fundamental commitment to the Islamic Republic. Despite Bazargan's constant criticism and complaints that they represented the "Rule of Revenge," they survived and formed an important base of power for the clergy organized in the Islamic Republican party (IRP).

On July 3, an Assembly of Experts was elected; 10,735,240 voters elected seventy-five members to represent the entire country. The decision to limit the number of representatives gave rise to controversy and criticism. Government authorities justified the limit of seventy-five members on the grounds that provisional, disorderly conditions prevailing within the country did not permit prolonged debate and that the national interest required a rapid end to such conditions (Interior Minister Y. Sahabi, *Ettelaat*, June 16, 1979). Opponents countered that restricting the assembly would reduce popular participation and prepare the way for the "monopolization" of power. They also attacked the way in which assembly seats had been allocated. Religious minorities, excluding Baha'is (who were considered heretics), totaled less than 500,000 and had been given four seats, roughly one seat for every 125,000 people. In contrast, the remaining 35.5 million people had been allocated seventy-one seats, or an average of one seat for every 500,000 people. Despite criticism, the Bazargan government proceeded with the plan.

After the elections, several organizations charged that voting had been marred by numerous irregularities. The critics included Ayatollah Mahalati of Shiraz (*Kayhan*, August 9, 1979), the Society of Merchants and Shopkeepers of Mashhad (*Kayhan*, August 16, 1979), the Society of the Clergy in Mashhad, the Fedayeen, five Islamic political organizations including the Mojahedeen (*Kayhan*, August 9, 1979), and the Moslem People's Republican party, established in Azerbaijan and supported by Ayatollah Shariat-Madari (*Kayhan*, August 11, 1979). Despite their protests, the election as a whole was declared valid, although votes from ten polls in Tehran were thrown out. In August 1979, seventy-four of the seventy-five duly elected members held their first meeting. The sole dissenter was Dr. Abdolrahman Ghasemlou, the Kurdish representative, who boycotted the assembly to protest the army's bombing of Paveh, a Kurdish city (*Kayhan*, August 9, 1979).

2. International protests and pressure evidently prevented the regime from fully carrying out its anti-Baha'i campaign, which was eventually halted.
3. Leaflet in the possession of author. The statement has also been published in Khomeini 1983, 1:215.
4. This information came from a statement issued by the Freedom Movement (abroad) in 1975.
5. Statement by Ahmad Khomeini, son of Ayatollah Khomeini (*Ettelaat*, September 23, 1979).
6. Various issues of *Mojahed* in 1981, particularly no. 106, January 20, 1981.
7. See various statements in *Zamimeh*.
8. See statement by Mousavi-Tabrizi, prosecutor of the Islamic Republic, in *Jumhuri Eslami*, April 26, 1982.
9. Their statement was published by the Organization of Iranian Moslem Students (1978:60-61).
10. Arrests are not a complete indication of the distribution of radical clergy, for many doubtless avoided arrest by moving underground. Living clandestinely, however, would have limited their effectiveness in mobilizing the opposition.
11. M. J. 1979:82. Ashouri was killed in Boushehr by the military on December 4, 1978.
12. Abouzar 1978, vol. 1, pt. 1:141. This source claims that by the end at least three million people were participating in the protest.
13. These are all included in the various volumes of Khomeini's collection, published by the government of Iran.
14. In the early 1970s, Khomeini wrote a book advocating the establishment of an Islamic Republic. The contents of this book, however, and the nature of such a government were not widely known among Iranians because government repression prevented publication of the book in Iran. According to Khomeini, such a government would guarantee independence, freedom, and social justice. In an Islamic society, the ruler must possess two characteristics: first, he must be knowledgeable about the laws, and second, he must be just. Islamic laws were just and would protect the oppressed and the hungry. In this book, Khomeini argues for a theocratic state (Khomeini 1979).

## CHAPTER 8: THE FINAL COLLAPSE

1. The reported cases include an attack on bazaaris and leaders of the National Front at Karvansara Sangi; an assault on two members of the Writers' Association

who were in Lahijan to make speeches; an attack on university students who were mountain-climbing near Tehran.

2. During a massacre by army troops of Tehran demonstrators on September 8, one soldier refused to fire upon protesters as ordered; instead, he shot his commanding officer. On October 26, a soldier shot and killed the chief of police of Jahrom and seriously wounded the military governor. Two soldiers in Mashhad were killed by their officer for insubordination on December 3. That same day, a soldier was ordered to open fire on a group of people; when he instead turned his gun on the colonel who had given the order, he was quickly shot by the officer. Another soldier, Mohsen Mobasher, shot and wounded the governor of Hamedan and one of his bodyguards on December 12. The next day, the army opened fire on a group of people listening to a sermon in Shoushtar; more than thirty were killed. One soldier, who was angered by the incident, tossed his gun into the crowd and tried to run away but was shot and killed by a policeman. On December 14, two soldiers joined demonstrators in Rezaieh; one of them killed a major and two policemen and was in turn slain. In Mashhad, a sergeant shot and wounded a cleric on December 17 and was in turn killed by a policeman. On December 30, 150 soldiers who were ordered to open fire on protesters in Mashhad turned their weapons over to the demonstrators and joined the protest. An air force cadet fired on his commanding officer and the deputy commander on January 11, but failed to kill them. On January 12, a soldier who refused to open fire on demonstrators in Rasht was killed by his commander (see M. J. 1979, and various issues of *Akhtar*, *Hambastegi*, and *Ettelaat*).

3. On November 11, a religious holiday, the army opened fire on a group of peaceful demonstrators leaving a mosque in Khorramshahr. Nineteen people were killed, including two military men who committed suicide rather than shoot the demonstrators. A few days later in the same city, army troops again fired into a crowd of demonstrators, killing a baby in her mother's arms. One soldier who witnessed the event shot and killed a sergeant, another soldier, and then himself. In Tehran during the funeral on December 27 of Dr. Nejat-Ollahy, a university professor, one soldier killed his commanding officer and then committed suicide.

## CHAPTER 9: CONFLICTS WITHIN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

1. Speaker of the Majles, Hojjat Al-Eslam Hashemi-Rafsanjani (*Jumhuri Eslami*, October 30, 1982).
2. Professor Homa Nategh presented this data from the College of Literature at