



COMMUNISM II. IN PERSIA FROM 1941 TO 1953

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With the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Persia and the abdication of Reżā Shah on 25 Šahrīvar 1320 Š./16 September 1941, the climate for resumption of political activities was vastly improved. Under a general amnesty political prisoners, including members of the Marxist-Leninist group led by [Taqī Arānī](#) (in Western sources usually Erani) between the two world wars, were released from prison. On 7 Mehr 1320 Š./29 September 1941 a number of Arānī's followers met with a group of politicians at the residence of [Solaymān-Mīrzā Eskandarī](#), an elderly prince of the Qajar family and a veteran of the early Persian socialist movement (see [democrat party](#)), to form a moderate socialist party. Rostam Aliev, first secretary at the Soviet embassy, also attended the meeting, as a representative of the Comintern and liaison between the Soviet communist party and the new group, thus continuing the traditional connection between Persian communists and the Soviet party. At the end of the meeting the formation of *Ḥezb-e Tūda-ye Īrān* (Tudeh party of Iran) was announced (Eskandarī, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 297-326; Malekī, pp. 343, 376-78; Nikbīn, p. 149; Ṭabarī, pp. 42-45; Zabih, 1966, pp. 71-74). The links with the Soviet Union do not appear to have been a liability in the years of Allied occupation during World War II, but in the postwar period, as the Soviets



began to use national communist groups as leverage against the central government, the inevitable conflict with nationalist sentiment led to major setbacks for Persian communists.

On 17 Mehr 1321 Š./9 October 1942 the first provincial conference of the Tudeh party (Naḡostīn konfarāns-e ayālatī) was convened in Tehran, with the participation of most of the former political prisoners. A provisional charter (*Asās-nāma-ye mowaqqat*) was adopted, and a provisional fifteen-member executive committee was elected. Initially the party played down its communist orientation and pursued a nonrevolutionary strategy, promoting a populist, democratic, and reformist platform. The latter included abolition of the Anti-communist act (Qānūn-e mojāzāt-e moqdemīn baṛ'alayh-e amnīyat wa esteqlāl-e kešvar) of 1310 Š./1931 (see i, above); various types of labor legislation, including a mandatory eight-hour work day; redistribution of state and crown lands among the peasantry; and political rights for women (Kāma'ī, II, pp. 20-27, 73-74; Malekī, pp. 343, 376-78; Nikbīn, pp. 149-55; Ṭabarī, pp. 42-45).

In this initial phase of the Tudeh party's existence the main arenas for party activity were the Soviet-occupied northern provinces (Azarbaijan, Gīlān, Māzandarān, and Khorasan), Tehran, Isfahan, and the oil province of Kūzestān. In the elections for 120 seats in the Fourteenth Majles, in 1322 S./1943, the party sponsored twenty-three candidates, of whom nine were elected. The party claimed nearly 200,000 votes, "over 70 percent of the votes cast in their constituencies, over thirteen percent of those cast in the whole country, and over twice as many as any other political party" (Abrahamian, p. 292; cf. Zabih, 1966, p. 79). The credentials of one of the victorious candidates, the journalist and seasoned revolutionary Ja'far Javādzāda (Pīšavarī), were rejected by the Majles, however, and the Tudeh parliamentary faction was thus reduced to eight. Nevertheless, it soon demonstrated a mastery of parliamentary tactics and established itself as the champion of the poor and oppressed. On 10 Mordād 1323 Š./1 August 1944 the first party congress was held in Tehran, with 168 delegates representing 25,000 members organized in eighty local and twelve regional committees (Kāma'ī, II, pp. 109-16; Nikbīn, pp. 192-98). The occupations of 107 of the delegates are known; 27 percent were wage earners and 73 percent members of the intelligentsia, including writers and journalists, engineers, university instructors and school-teachers, middle-ranking civil servants, physicians, and lawyers (Abrahamian, p. 293; cf. Zabih, 1966, pp. 80-81).



At a public rally on 5 Ābān/27 October of that year the Tudeh party publicly expressed support of Soviet demands for an oil concession in northern Persia, comparable to that of the British in the south, and proposed that the region should be recognized as an essential security perimeter for the U.S.S.R. The party's pro-Soviet line had three components: "positive equilibrium," meaning that the Soviets should receive economic and political concessions equal to those enjoyed by Great Britain; the security perimeter; and insistence that a socialist state like the Soviet Union was inherently noncolonial (*Rahbar*, 19 Mehr 1324 Š./11 October 1945, p. 1; Ṭabarī, pp. 62-65; Kāma'ī, II, pp. 128-45; Nīkbīn, pp. 207-36; Zabih, 1966, p. 94). In obedience to Soviet instructions, the Tudeh party joined in a coalition government led by Aḥmad Qawām (10 Mordād-25 Mehr 1325 Š./1 August-17 October 1946), considered by the Soviets a progressive statesman and expected to arrange the desired oil concession.

In the autumn of 1324 Š./1945 declared communist groups had launched separatist movements in the provinces of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan, with the support of Soviet troops. The Democratic parties of both provinces (Ferqa-ye demokrāt-e Ādarbāyjān and Hezb-e demokrāt-e Kordestān [Komela]) declared independent republics reminiscent of the Gīlān republic of 1299-1300/1920-21 (see i, above), in that they were made possible by the presence of Red Army units (at least until May 1946) and the active support of the Soviet diplomatic corps in Persia. The two provincial Democratic parties thus shared with the Tudeh party the leading role in Persian communism between September 1945 and December 1946. Again following the pattern of the Gīlān republic, those of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan came to an inglorious end after only a year, when Soviet troops were withdrawn and the central government reoccupied the two provinces (*Eṭṭelā'āt*, 10 Mordād 1324 Š./1 August, 1945, p. 1; Eskandarī, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 387-430; Jawdat, passim; Jahānšāhlū Afšār, pp. 231-361; Malekī, pp. 375-428; Nīkbīn, pp. 270-459; Azimi, pp. 147-79; Ṭabarī, pp. 66-77; Zabih, 1966, pp. 98-120). The Tudeh party was once again the sole communist organization in Persia.

Throughout this period the party was active in recruiting among the working class, and at the height of its influence, in 1325 Š./1946, it claimed the loyalty of 300,000 workers organized in the Central united council of workers and toilers (Šūrā-ye mottaḥeda-ye markazī-e kārgarān wa zaḥmatkešān) under the leadership of veteran communist Reżā Rūstā (*World Trade Union Movement*, 19 December 1949, pp. 30-31; cf. Ladjevardi, pp. 28-69). Although the union maintained a nonpolitical stance, control of its activities was ensured by the



inclusion on its executive committee of three secretaries from the Tudeh party executive committee. In addition, 60 percent of the union members were also members of the party. There was, however, considerable tension between the two bodies over ideological and political matters. For example, the party, during its participation in the short-lived coalition government, forced the union to end a strike of 23 Tīr 1325 Š./14 July 1946 in the oilfields at Ābādān, in order to avoid any charge of disloyalty to the government.

The Tudeh party faced a severe ideological and political crisis after the collapse of the insurrections in Azarbaijan and Kurdistan, a crisis that was aggravated when a draft treaty for oil concessions to the Soviets was rejected by the Fifteenth Majles on 29 Mehr 1326 Š./21 October 1947. More than 100 leaders and prominent members left the party on 13 Dey 1326 Š./3 January 1948. At that stage the Tudeh party seemed to be seeking a more rigid and disciplined organization. Most of the old leaders, men like Īraj Eskandari, ‘Abd-al-Šamad Kāmbaḡš, and Rūstā, whose connections with Moscow were well known, had fled the country. The new leaders were prominent members of Arānī’s group who shared communist ideals but appeared less committed to the interests of the Soviet Union than the earlier leaders had been (Nīkbīn, pp. 463-75; Ṭabarī, pp. 79-82; Kāmā’ī, III, pp. 10-93; Malekī, pp. 53-80, 458-63; Zabih, 1966, pp. 123-41).

After weathering several schisms in the wake of the Azarbaijan failure the party convened its second congress in Tehran on 5 Ordībehešt 1327 Š./25 April 1948, with 118 delegates representing almost every region of the country. Rūstā (in absentia), the general secretary of the Central united council, and two other secretaries of the union were elected to the enlarged Tudeh central committee (Alavi, 1955, p. 103; Kāmā’ī, II, pp. 314-18; Zabih, 1966, pp. 149-61). The union could thus no longer claim to be independent and nonpolitical. Six study groups were formed to examine various aspects of party life and to draft a series of resolutions, including a call for a new party charter to reinforce the principle of democratic centralism, reaffirmation of previous party policies coupled with acknowledgment of tactical errors by the former leadership, and condemnation of leftist “avant-gardist” and “centrist” factionalism. The revised charter provided for a nineteen-member central committee, with fifteen alternate members; together these thirty-four members constituted the plenum. An eleven-man executive board and a five-man control commission were elected by the plenum; the executive board was in turn divided into political and organizational bureaus (Ṭabarī, in *Mardom* 2/9, Ordībehešt 1327



Š./May 1948, pp. 1-8). The aims of the new charter were to incorporate firm Leninist principles and to enhance the party as a working-class organization. In July the Tehran provincial committee held a general assembly of party activists to hear a quarterly report from Eḥsān Ṭabarī, the political second secretary of the party. He emphasized the training of party cadres and, in another parallel to the collapse of the Gīlān republic, noted the absence in Persia of a large industrial proletariat, blaming this objective reality for the failure of the revolutionary undertaking in 1324-25 Š./1945-46 (A. Qāsemī, in *Mardom* 2/10, 1327 Š./1948, pp. 59-71). On 7 Mehr 1327 Š./29 September 1948, as the party celebrated its seventh anniversary, Ṭabarī and other leaders reaffirmed the party's identification with international communism and their loyalty to the Soviet Union by denouncing the break of Tito (Josip Broz) with Josef Stalin (Abrahamian, pp. 312-18; Zabih, 1966, pp. 141-48).

The last impressive showing of party strength occurred in a memorial ceremony at Arānī's grave on 15 Bahman 1327 Š./4 February 1949, when a large number of members and sympathizers assembled. At the same time a Tudeh party member made an attempt on the shah's life, which resulted in the banning of the party and its affiliates (Farmāndārī, 1336 Š./1957, p. 108). Although the top leaders escaped the country, eight members of the central committee and a majority of the leaders of the Central united council were arrested and tried before a military tribunal. Thirteen of the fugitives received death sentences in absentia, and those who were caught were sentenced to terms of five to ten years (*World Trade Union Movement*, March 1950, pp. 34, 35; Kāma'i, III, pp. 123-47; Kešāvarz, pp. 65-71; Ṭabarī, pp. 83-86). For a time the party was limited to underground activity, both inside the country and in exile, but, with the rise of the nationalist movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it reemerged in the guise of various front organizations like Jam'iyat-e mobāraza bā este'mār (Society against colonialism), Jam'iyat-e īrānī-e hawādārān-e šolḥ (Iranian society of partisans for peace), and a number of youth clubs (*bāšgāh-e javānān*; Zabih, 1966, p. 173). These front organizations accounted for about 25 percent of the support for coalitions of noncommunist parties and organizations and played a major role in mobilizing mass support on various occasions during the critical years of the drive to nationalize Persian oil and Moḥammad Mošaddeq's tenure as premier (Ordibehešt 1330-Mordād 1332 Š./May 1951-August 1953).

The Tudeh party itself declined to support Mošaddeq and often mobilized its forces to oppose his government. It accused Mošaddeq's National front (Jabha-



ye mellī) and its program for nationalizing the oil industry of being a “dependent bourgeois movement,” guided by American imperialism. Not until the uprising on 30 Tīr 1331 Š./20 July 1952, which brought about the reinstatement of Moṣaddeq, who had resigned on 26 Tīr/16 July, did the party relax its opposition to his government and begin to accept its legitimacy (Eskandarī, 1959, pp. 10-15; Kāma’ī, III, pp. 206-13, 275-82, 348-63, 402-06; *Kār-nāma*, pp. 71-278; Nīkbīn, pp. 559-73; Ṭabarī, pp. 168-70; Zabih, 1966, p. 173). One major achievement of the party in this period was the infiltration of all branches of the Persian armed forces, particularly during the later months of Moṣaddeq’s government (see, e.g., Farmāndārī, 1335 Š./1956, *passim*). This network, which was under the control of the party’s civilian leadership, was responsible for freeing nine Tudeh leaders in a dramatic prison break in December 1950. In contrast to the Tudeh party itself, however, the military cells avowed a communist ideology and total support for the Soviet Union (Farmāndārī, 1335 Š./1956, pp. 41-46). In mid-1331 Š./1952 the Tudeh party itself adopted a new draft program, in which it abandoned all pretense of adhering to democratic and constitutional principles and called for violent overthrow of the government in favor of a “genuine people’s democracy” (*Barnāma-ye Hezb-e tūda*, 1331 Š./1952, p. 14).

On 28 Mordād 1332 Š./19 August 1953, when the Moṣaddeq government was overthrown by a [coup d’etat](#) directed by the [American Central Intelligence Agency](#), the Tudeh party once again faced suppression. By the end of 1334 Š./1955 it had been almost entirely wiped out. In that period 3,000 party activists were arrested; some were imprisoned and others sent into domestic exile on islands in the Persian Gulf. The party was reduced to a small number of underground cells with a total membership of 3,000-4,000. Furthermore, in the summer of 1333 Š./1954 the military governorship of Tehran uncovered the Tudeh network within the military and arrested 548 members, ranging in rank from junior noncommissioned officers to colonels. Twenty-eight officers, representing the top leadership, were executed, and others received sentences ranging from life to six months suspended (Farmāndārī, 1336 Š./1957, pp. 345-72). To reinforce the legal basis for its anticommunist campaign, the government passed a new subversive-activities control act in 1333 Š./1954, to replace the statute of 1310 Š./1931.



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