



CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION V. POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD

CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION

v. Political parties of the constitutional period

Political parties were first officially organized after Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah was forced to abdicate in 1327/1909, at about the time elections for the Second Majles were beginning (see ii, above). Four parties, or *hezbs*, were represented in the Majles: the Democrats (Ferqa-ye demokrāt-e Īrān, ejtemāʿiyūn-e ʿāmmiyūn), the Moderate Socialists (Ejtemāʿiyūn-e eʿtedāliyyūn), and two very small parties, the Liberals (Āzādīk^vāhān) and Union and Progress (Ettēfāq wa taraqqī). In Azarbaijan there were also a number of socialist parties, including Sūsiālīst Ūnīfiya and the Armenian *Dāšnāk*, but, as they were not represented in the Majles, they will not be dealt with here.

Democrats. The Democratic party was the most powerful party in the Second Majles. It originated in the Ejtemāʿiyūn-e ʿāmmiyūn, or Social Democratic party, a radical secret group that had probably been organized by Ḥaydar Khan ʿAm(ū)og̃lī just before the elections for the First Majles, toward the end of



1324/1906 (Eqbāl, p. 70; Ādamīyat, 1354 Š./1975, passim). ‘Amoḡlī had been sent by the Russian Socialist party at Baku to establish a comparable group in Persia just before the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution in that year (Eqbāl). The program of the Ejtemā’iyūn-e ‘āmmīyūn included such principles as the separation of religion from politics, the distribution of landed estates among the peasants, and protection for the poor (*Donyā* 3/4, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 86-87; 4/3, 1343 Š./1964, pp. 87-89).

In contrast to the Social Democrats, the Democrats were an officially recognized party, composed mainly of middle-class intellectuals. They severed direct ties with Baku (Ravasani, p. 153) and dropped the name Ejtemā’iyūn, which had revolutionary connotations, claiming thenceforth to be seeking gradual change through parliamentary means. ‘Amoḡlī maintained close connections with the Democratic party, nevertheless. The party published its organizational program, or *neẓām-nāma*, in 1328/1910 (Etteḡādīya, 1982b, pp. 5-8, 11-19) and its political program, or *marām-nāma*, in 1329/1911; the latter was indeed less radical than the program of the Ejtemā’iyūn. The party professed strong nationalism and declared itself the protector of the peasants; it also favored the separation of religion from politics (Etteḡādīya, 1361 Š./1982, pp. 199-246; Afšār, pp. 364-66).

The organization of the Democratic party consisted of a central committee with provincial branches and a parliamentary committee (Etteḡādīya, 1982b, pp. 5-8, 11-19), which took its orders from the central committee (Taqīzāda, *Majmū’a*). The official party organ was *Īrān-e now*, edited by Moḡammad-Amīn Rasūlzāda, a former member of Ejtemā’iyūn-e ‘āmmīyūn (Āryanpūr, *Az Šabā tā Nīmā* II, pp. 108-10; Ādamīyat, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 285-314; Šadr Hāšemī, *Jarā’ed o majallāt* I, pp. 345-49; see vi, below). It was strongly opposed to Russian influence in Persia, particularly the occupation of Azarbaijan (see ii, above). The ideology of the editor included some Marxist-Leninist ideas, for instance, the significance of class conflict and the revolutionary tactics recommended to the party. The provincial branches were also active and published their own newspapers, particularly in Tabrīz, where there were many Armenian Social Democrats, who, however, remained aloof from the new party (Afšār, pp. 323-29). In addition, the central committee sponsored a literary society (Majma‘-e adab), which published a paper called *Kawkab-e dorri* (see vii, below).

The leader of the parliamentary branch of the Democratic party was Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda, who had been closely associated with the Ejtemā’iyūn-e



‘ammīyūn in the First Majles. After the bombardment of the Majles by forces loyal to Moḥammad-‘Alī Shah in 1326/1908 (see ii, above) he took refuge in the British embassy and eventually fled to London; he was later invited back to Tabrīz, whence he made his way to Tehran in the wake of the forces led by Sepahdār Tonokābonī (Taqīzāda, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 75 ff.). In Tehran he helped to organize the new Democratic party (Afšār, pp. 238-62).

The Democratic party differed from most socialist parties on two major points: It was extremely nationalistic and also claimed to act within the tenets of Islam (Etteḥādīya, 1982a, pp. 44-45). In fact, however, it covertly opposed the influence and interference of the ‘*olamā*’ in politics and called for compulsory free education. Its leaders eventually broke with Sayyed ‘Abd-Allāh Behbahānī, one of the great constitutionalist ‘*olamā*’ (see i, above). Behbahānī was murdered on 9 Rajab 1328/18 July 1910, and suspicion fell upon the Democrats (Šarīf Kāšānī, II, p. 542; Taqīzāda, 1368 Š./1989, pp. 144, 152-54, 349-50); Taqīzāda again had to flee the country. He had already been condemned by the conservative ‘*olamā*’ of the ‘*Atabāt*’ (Shi‘ite holy cities in Iraq) for alleged “corrupt political beliefs” (*fesād-e maslak-e sīāsī*; see *Ḥabl al-matīn* 16, 13 Šawwāl 1328/29 October 1910; cf. Afšār, p. 207-12). The party survived, however, and leadership in the Majles passed to Solaymān Mīrẓā Eskandarī, who had been active politically since the First Majles.

Moderate Socialists. The Ejtemā‘īyūn e’tedālīyūn was the most important political party after the Democrats, who ridiculed its name, demanding to know who had ever heard of “moderate” socialists. The membership consisted largely of landowners and constitutionalist ‘*olamā*’. It was organized at the beginning of the elections for the Second Majles, and its purpose seems to have been less to pursue a specific program than to oppose the Democratic program, which threatened the interests of the landed and religious classes. Its members therefore emphasized the need for gradual and moderate development (Etteḥādīya, 1982a, pp. 225-35).

This party had the backing of some influential politicians, but it is not quite clear who the leader was. Both Mīrẓā Moḥammad-Šādeq Ṭabāṭabā‘ī and ‘Alī-Moḥammad Dawlatābādī have been mentioned in this respect. It published two newspapers, *Waqt* (Time), and *Majles*, edited by Ḥosayn Kasmā‘ī and Ṭabāṭabā‘ī respectively. The party claimed to uphold the principles of Islam and proposed military, judicial, and economic reforms. It also expressed support for freedom of association and the press, limitation of the work week, prohibition of child labor, and wages in accordance with work performed,



while maintaining that private ownership of large landed estates was justifiable as long as it did not “harm society” (Etteḥādīya, 1982a, pp. 230-35).

Other parties. The Ettefāq wa taraqqī and the Āzādīk^vāhān were insignificant in numbers but held the balance of power between the other two, neither of which had a clear majority in the Second Majles.

Party politics in the Second Majles. The death of the regent ‘Alī-Rezā Khan Qājār ‘Āzod-al-Molk in 1328/1910 benefited the Moderate Socialist party, which nominated the successful candidate to replace him, Mīrzā Abu’l-Qāsem Khan Nāṣer-al-Molk. Nāṣer-al-Molk had no sympathy for the Democrats and obliged the remaining parties to form a coalition in support of his government, a move that was effective for a time (Etteḥādīya, 1982a, pp. 287-95).

On 12 Ṣafar 1328/2 February 1911 the Majles approved the appointment of the American Morgan Shuster as treasurer-general, with a brief to reform the finances of Persia. He was sympathetic to the Democrats, and it was probably with their encouragement that he chose to ignore the provisions of the [Anglo-Russian Convention](#) of 1325/1907, by which Persia had been divided into two spheres of influence. He thus aggravated an already uneasy situation (Shuster, pp. 83-109, 313). The Russians assisted the deposed shah, Moḥammad-‘Alī, in an attempt to regain the throne in December 1911, but the attempt was unsuccessful, partly owing to Shuster, who provided the government with the funds necessary to organize armed resistance. The Russians then presented the government with an ultimatum, demanding the dismissal of Shuster and threatening to occupy Tehran.

The Democrats prevailed upon a majority of the deputies to refuse compliance with these demands, thus successfully breaking up the coalition. The government, on the other hand, favored compliance with the demands and persuaded enough deputies to form a committee to negotiate with the Russians. On 3 Moḥarram 1330/24 December 1911 Nāṣer-al-Molk closed the Majles, the term of which had already expired. Many of the deputies were exiled, newspapers were closed down, and the Majles did not sit again for nearly three years. During this interval Russian and British influence on the government increased enormously.

Party politics in the Third Majles. Gradually, however, the exiled deputies made their way back to Tehran, and a campaign to reopen the Majles gained momentum; newspapers played a leading role in this campaign (see, e.g., *Ra’d*



16, 25 Šafar 1332/23 January 1914; 19, 9 Rabī' I/6 February; 25, 27 Du'l-ḥejja/17 November; *Now-bahār* 7, 2 Rabī' I 1332/30 January 1914; 8, 6 Rabī' I 1332/4 February 1914). The Russians finally agreed that elections could begin in Tehran in January 1914, provided that no Democrat should participate (van Largenhuysen, p. 54; *Now-bahār* 50, 25 Rajab 1332/20 June 1914). Provincial elections began a year later, except in Azarbaijan, where the pro-Russian governor Šojā'-al-Dawla prevented them (Kasrawī, *Mašrūṭa*³, pp. 576-86; *Ra'd* 37, 18 Rabī' II, 1332/17 March 1914; 40, 1 Jomādā I, 1332/29 March 1914). The Third Majles opened on 16 Moḥarram 1333/4 December 1914.

Three political parties (*ferāksīon* < Fr. *fraction*; Bahār, p. 13) participated in the Third Majles. According to Moḥammad-Taqī Malek-al-Šo'arā' Bahār, the Democrats won twenty-four seats, despite the attempted Russian ban; the E'tedāliyyūn twenty-nine seats; Hay'at-e 'elmīya, a party of the conservative 'olamā' led by Sayyed Ḥasan Modarres, fourteen seats; and independents twenty seats (various figures are given in the sources, e.g., *Kāva* 3, 1336/1918, pp. 228-30; Sepehr, pp. 102-04). The Democrats, by joining in a coalition, Hay'at-e mo'talefa, with the independents and some of the E'tedāliyyūn, for the first time enjoyed a majority, with Hay'at-e 'elmīya in opposition (*Kāva* 3, 1336/1918, pp. 226-28; Bahār, p. 13 n. 1).

During the second round of elections in Tehran in March 1915 well-known Democratic candidates were sponsored by the party, and there was some canvassing, as reported in the party newspaper *Now-bahār* (31, 1 Jomādā II 1332/27 April 1914; cf. 35, 16 Jomādā II 1332/12 May 1914; 50, 25 Rajab 1332/20 June 1914). As a result, membership in the parliamentary Democratic party increased to thirty-one (*Ra'd* 98, 26 Jomādā I 1333/12 March 1915). As in the Second Majles, the Democratic leader was Solaymān Mīrzā.

There were about twenty-five Moderate (E'tedālī) deputies, who claimed to support gradual reform through evolution. They were not as well organized as the Democrats and were divided into two main factions, probably reflecting personal rivalries. Sayyed Moḥammad-Šādeq Ṭabāṭabā'ī led one faction, Mīrzā 'Alī-Moḥammad Dawlatābādī the other. In fact, the Dawlatābādī group often joined with the Democrats in the Third Majles, and this association continued even during the exodus (*mohājarat*) of pro-German deputies and politicians from Tehran as Russian troops advanced on the city in November 1915 (see iv, above).

The formation of Hay'at-e 'elmīya represented a change in tactics by the



conservative *'olamā'*; rather than continuing to follow the example of Shaikh Fażl-Allāh Nūrī and denouncing socialists as Babis and materialists as enemies of Islam, they formed a political party to challenge the programs of the Democrats and the E'tedāliyūn within the Majles. No doubt growing secularism in Persia after 1324/1906 had prompted this decision to participate more actively in politics. Furthermore, the assassinations and executions of prominent religious leaders must have influenced their followers to seek greater political power. Aside from the assassination of Behbahānī, Shaikh Fażl-Allāh had been tried and executed, possibly at the prompting of the Democrats, in 1327/1909. Hay'at-e 'elmīya had about seventeen members in the Majles, led by Modarres. It opposed increased government power, higher taxation, and such modern measures as taxes on landed property and the opening of a teachers' college for women (*Moḍākarāt*, 1333-34/1914-15, passim). For the most part, however, the party was unsuccessful, as it was outnumbered by the other parties.

Party politics in the mohājarat and after. In November 1915, as Russian troops advanced on Tehran, there was a major exodus (*mohājarat*) of Majles deputies and their supporters to Qom (see iv, above). In Qom the Democrats were in the majority and continued to triumph over the 'Elmīya (Lustig, p. 119). After the *mohājerīn* had moved to Kermānšāh, where a provisional government was established, relations among the participating political parties, which had begun smoothly, gradually deteriorated (Lustig, pp. 225, 245), and the situation was further exacerbated by rivalry and friction between the Germans and their Ottoman allies. The Democrats preferred to work with the Germans (Lustig, pp. 232-33), whereas the 'Elmīya and the E'tedāliyūn, though fearing pan-Turkish designs on Azarbaijan, were nevertheless generally sympathetic to the Ottomans, as was the provisional prime minister, Reżāqolī Khan Neẓām-al-Salṭana. At about the time that the *mohājerīn* retreated to Qaṣr-e Šīrīn 'Amoḡlī and some extremist elements of the Democrat party instigated an attempt on the life of Neẓām-al-Salṭana (Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-e Yahyā* III, p. 354). As a result, the Democrats lost much of their prestige and influence among the *mohājerīn*. Destabilized by mutual tensions and adversity, the parties at last disbanded for the duration of the war (Bahār, pp. 21-23; Lustig, p. 255).

Toward the end of the war, some of the *mohājerīn*, including a number of Democrats, returned to Tehran. These Democrats, inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Abrahamian, p. 112), attempted to reorganize the party



under the leadership of Bahār (*Now-bahār* 11, 1333/1917). The central committee, originally organized in accordance with the *nezām-nāma* of the party, seems to have been very active at that time (*Now-bahār* 89, 10 Rabī I 1336/24 January 1918; 104, 19 Jomādā I 1336/3 March 1918; 106, 23 Jomādā I 1336/7 March 1918). Bahār's group, known as the Taškīlīs, published *Now-bahār*, *Īrān*, and *Zabān-e āzād*, all of which initiated campaigns for new elections. Another group of party members who opposed the new organization formed a new party called Taškīlāt-e Demokrāthā-ye žedd-e taškīlī and published a paper called *Setāra-ye Īrān* (Bahār, p. 27). When the first elections for the Fourth Majles were held, in 1335/1917, the Democrats won a majority, but, owing to popular resentment of the agreement reached in August 1919 by Prime Minister Moḥammad-Walī Khan Sepah-sālār and the British, by which the latter were granted nearly total control of the Persian government, the elections were suspended. By the time they were resumed, in 1336/1918, the Democratic party had split definitively. Some members joined the former E'tedāliyūn to form the Eşlāḥtālabān, or reform party (Bahār, pp. 57-59).

The constitutional period can be said to have ended with the dismissal of the Third Majles. Until that time most of the questions confronting politicians and political parties were the same ones raised at the beginning of the Constitutional Revolution. After the war and the Russian Revolution, and especially after the [coup d'état of 1299 Š./1921](#), new problems arose, and political parties changed to meet new demands. Whereas the political parties in the Second and Third Majles, usually designated by the word *ḥezb* or *ferqa*, were ideologically based, later parties in the Majles, usually called *ferāksīon*, were built around personalities. Moreover, although the two main early parties, the Democrats and the E'tedāliyūn, had differed ideologically, they did share some common features. Their members were drawn largely from the same class, and they had little contact with the people for whom they claimed to speak. The Democrats enjoyed the advantage of having a more coherent program and a stronger organization, both loosely modeled on those of the Russian Socialist party. The Democratic program posed a threat to the landed class and the 'olamā', however, and thus called forth strong opposition.

The evaluation of the role played by the parties is problematic. They were generally unpopular and blamed for division and disruption. Furthermore, the Democrats' extreme nationalism and hostility to foreign powers were largely responsible for arousing British and Russian antagonism, and the consequences were ruinous to the country and to constitutional government



itself. It appears that, largely owing to World War I, there had been too little time for constitutional institutions to mature and create an atmosphere conducive to the development of genuine party politics.

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