



## HNČ'AK

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**HNČ'AK**, colloquial term referring to the members of the Social Democratic Hnč'akean Party [SDHP], also called Hnč'akean Revolutionary Party and Hnč'akean Social Democratic Party; it was also the name of the party's first periodical. Founded in Switzerland by Russian Armenians in 1887, the party quickly established branches in Persia, the Russian empire, the Ottoman empire, Europe, America, and the Balkans. It was strongly influenced by Russian and Balkan revolutionary movements as well as by Marxism; and, with a centralized structure, it was the only early Armenian political party to call for the complete independence of Ottoman Armenia, with Russian and Persian Armenia to be liberated forthwith. The stated goal was to create a national democratic state through revolution, where a true socialist society would be established (Nalbandian, pp. 104-31; Ter Minassian, pp. 73-167).

After the destruction caused by the Ottoman persecution of Armenians, the creation of a Soviet Armenia led the SDHP to support this new state as the nucleus to which other liberated lands should be attached. The SDHP never actually took any steps aimed at detaching territory from Persia. The party became one of the three "traditional" Armenian political parties in the Armenian diaspora, and today maintains a presence in many countries of North and South America, Europe, and the Middle East, as well as the Republic of Armenia (Arkun, 1991, pp. 26-28).

The first Hnč'akean Party branch of Persia was formed in Tabriz in 1890 or 1891; and, in the next twenty years, branches proliferated throughout the country, especially in various villages of Salmās, Urmia, and other districts of



Azarbaijan, as well as Rašt, Anzali, Qazvin, Koy, Marāḡa, Tehran, and (New) Jolfā in Isfahan suburb (Kitur, 1962, I, pp. 200, 202; Gangruni, pp. 132-33, 138; Gelofoanc', 22 January and 1 July 1916; Hangoyc', February 1924, p. 144; August 1923, p. 94; R'.; Sarmat; Tēr Vardanean, 1930a, pp. 113-15; Arkun, 1997, p. 28; Hrahat; Šant'ean; Mušel; Astłuni, pp. 194-97; Minasean, p. 127). The central executive committee for the Persia Region of the party was based in Tabriz, though in the 1920s the Tehran branch attempted to take control over the region (Artemius; G. Elikean, January 1940, pp. 98, 110-11).

Small local armed groups were established. Party members often held jobs as school teachers or principals, which enabled them to recruit new members while working. They organized theater groups, women's associations, and literary readings, and gave lectures on social and political topics (Tēr Vardanean, 1930a, pp. 113-15). Frequent quarrels took place with members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (see DAŠNAK; see, e.g., Xanazat, pp. 99-100; Yovhannisian, pp. 105-6, 111-14; Amurean, 1950, p. 47; Hangoyc', August 1923, p. 94; May 1924, pp. 138-39; June 1924, pp. 142-44).

The party and its leading activists published several Armenian-language newspapers in Persia, the most important of which were *Zank* (1910-22, with interruptions), *Mitk'* (1912-17), and *Payk'ar* (1918-19), all in Tabriz (Xosrov; Tēr Xač'aturean, pp. 24, 30, 34, 42; Patmagrean, p. 42).

Until the Persian Constitutional Revolution (q.v.), the Hnč'ak party branches in Persia were primarily concerned with the fate of Armenians in the Ottoman empire and the Caucasus, as well as the defense of local Armenian villages against plunder and tribal attacks. Arms and men were sent to the Ottoman empire, often to nearby Van. At times monasteries on the borders of Persia, and the Ottoman and Russian empires, like St. Step'anos Naxavkay in Julfa, were used as convenient bases (Kitur, 1962, I, pp. 200-213; Gangruni, pp. 137-39; Karnō, p. 3; Aĵēm Manuēl). In 1908 Hnč'akean bodies in Tabriz, Tbilisi, and possibly the Ottoman empire assisted, with arms and men, Sattār Khan and the revolutionary fighters (*mojāheds*) in Tabriz, who were fighting the forces loyal to Miḡammad-'Ali Shah (A. Elikean, 1920, p. 2). The party reached an agreement in Tbilisi on 16 Du'l-qa'da 1326/27 November 1908 with the Ejtemā'iyun-e āmmiyun party (q.v.) to provide them with all necessary military, financial, and physical aid. A special joint executive committee was formed with two members of the SDHP as well as an Armenian Social Democrat, while in Tabriz a secret military council included the resistant leaders, Sattār Khan and Bāqer Khan, as well as representatives of three Armenian political groups,



including the Hnč'akean party (Gelofeanc', pp. 3-6; Kitur, 1962, I, p. 399).

The Tbilisi joint executive negotiated with the Russian Social Democrat Workers party to send to Rašt a group of twenty-three armed men of the Georgian Valiko. In Rašt and Anzali they entered into an understanding with the local armed Hnč'akean group. On 26 January 1909 they joined Ḥosayn Khan Kasmā'i, the leader of Ejte-mā'iyun āmmiyun, and Armenian Hnč'akean fighters in an attack on the government's mansion in Rašt and occupying it (Gelofeanc', 1915, p. 10; Faḵrā'i, pp. 115 ff.). A group of twenty-one Hnč'akean fighters, led by Petros Melik' Andrēasean of the Armenian village of Mužumbār near Tabriz, were among the forces of Moḥammad-Wali Khan Sepahsālār Tonokāboni in his expedition against the capital, participating in the fighting and decision making (Gelofeanc', 1915, pp. 13-15; Melik' Andrēasean). The Hnč'akeans ended their armed activity after the capture of Tehran and the re-establishment of the constitutional government; Petros Melik' Andrēasean was appointed a member of the government's war commission and later assigned to head the Azarbaijan office of taxes on narcotics (Kasrawi, *Āḍarbāyjān*, p. 356). When the local SDHP executive objected that the party could not carry out police work, Melik' Andrēasean placed all his men and weapons under Ep'rem Khan (q.v.) and the SDHP's rival, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Andrēasean was hanged in January 1912 by the Russians when they occupied Tabriz (Gelofeanc', 1915, pp. 15-24; Yovhannisian, pp. 243-44; Ēlmar, pp. 192-93; Malekzāda, p. 1546; Kasrawi, *Āḍarbāyjān*, pp. 177, 356-60).

In July 1911 the SDHP formed a group of one hundred armed men as part of the efforts to defend Tehran against the ex-shah Moḥammad-'Ali ("Mayrak'alak'i norut'iwnner"). Other Hnč'akean armed groups defended Iranian Armenian villagers from the anarchic conditions of the Constitutional period ("Tōnō Lazarean," p. 231; Uni).

Ties with Persian Democrats continued in Tbilisi, Tabriz, and Tehran (Kitur, 1962, I, p. 404). Two Hnč-'akean members even agreed to assassinate Sālār-al-Dawla for the Democrats against the wishes of their own party, but they were caught and hanged in Kermānšāh in 1912 (Ašluni, pp. 196-97). In Gilān the Hnč'ak Yarut-'iwn Galstean was elected as a member of the provincial council (*anjoman-eyālati*; Ašluni, pp. 193-94; Faḵrā'i, p. 139).

During the turmoil of World War I and the Ottoman persecution of Armenians, the SDHP united with other Armenian political parties to form



various councils or groupings for defense, especially in areas occupied by Ottoman troops in northwestern Persia (Tēr-Vardanean, 1930b, pp. 73-100, 177-87; Patmagrean, pp. 69-72; Arkun, 1997, pp. 35-36). Many party members fought on Persian soil in Andranik Paša Ōzanean's volunteer forces and Russian and Soviet regiments (Kitur, 1956, p. 184; Š. T. May 1916; Banwor Hayk). In Gilān, the SDHP and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation entered into a non-aggression agreement with the Etteḥād-e Eslām in the spring of 1918, while SDHP leader, Grigor Eḥikean (Yaḡikiān), served the Jangalis as translator and advisor (Arkun, 1997, pp. 36-440; Chakeri, 1995, pp. 68-69, 188-90).

The events of the Russian Revolution raised the issue of union with the Bolshevik party. By November 1924, the SDHP decided to maintain its separate existence only outside of Soviet territory (G. Eḥikean, March 1940, p. 142; April 1940, p. 79; July 1940, pp. 133, 141; September 1940, pp. 155-62; Sirvard, pp. 42-44, 223-29; Kitur, 1962, I, pp. 496-99, 514-16, 521-25; Arkun, 1998, p. 170; Sōc'ial Dēmokrat Hnč'akean Varc'ut'iw, pp. 337-39). Persia's central executive and party branches shifted position on this issue several times (G. Eḥikean, March 1940, pp. 144-48; April 1940, pp. 92-96; Martuni, pp. 107, 117-20, 122).

After some internal struggles in the 1920s, all the branches in Persia adopted Sovietophile policies, including the party newspaper *Zang* (G. Eḥikean, December 1939, pp. 109-10, 129-30, 138-39; January 1940, pp. 98-99, 110-11, 127; August 1940, p. 136; Tēr Vardanean, p. 2; Sōc'ial Dēmokrat Hnč'akean kusaktsut'ean T'awrizi; Hnč'akean; Murč; T'ēhranc'i, p. 2). Hnč'ak party members and Armenian leftists were arrested in 1925 in many cities of Persia as part of a crackdown on Communist sympathizers (Anyayt; "Yušer . . ."; Erewan; Great Britain F.O.; Chaqueri, 1998, pp. 134-35; "Hakakommunistakan"). It is possible that Hnchakists were among those Armenians arrested in a new crackdown in September-October 1938 as well (Chaqueri, 1998, p. 136). The internal divisions and state persecution had already weakened the Persian branches by the 1930s (G. Eḥikean, Dec. 1939, p. 130; August 1940, p. 136; T'ēhranc'i), though, according to C. C. Hart, the Isfahan branch was somewhat stronger than the others. Meanwhile, the expulsion of Eḥikean, the main standard-bearer of the anti-Soviet faction, during the tenth general assembly of the Hnč'akean party in 1938, marked the end of this faction altogether (Kitur, 1962, I, p. 528). The party's traditional rival, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, benefited from the situation.

During World War II, when Persia was occupied by the Allied, Soviet



authorities permitted SDHP activities in Tabriz (Kennedy). This only provided a brief reprieve for the party, as state repression resumed shortly. By the 1950s, the party's activities appear to have ended in Persia (V. M., p. 3; Gangruni, p. 135). Emigration of numerous Iranian-Armenians, including SDHP partisans, to Soviet Armenia in 1946-47 was an additional factor in the weakening of the party (Kitur, 1962, I, p. 412; Chaqueri, 1998, pp. 137-43).

In addition to its activities for the Armenian cause and its vigorous involvement in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, the Hnč'akean party played an important role in the introduction and spread of socialist ideology in Persia. Its Anzali branch created one of the first Persian social democratic parties in 1910 and published some Persian-language articles and brochures (see G. Ełıkean). After World War I, the Hnč'akean branch in Rašt assisted the local branch of the Socialist Workers party (Kārgarān-e sosiālist) by serving as an intermediary with its headquarters in Tehran (Arkun, 1998, p. 168). A number of the founders of another early socialist group, the Tabriz Social Democratic Group, some of whom went on to help establish the Democratic Party of Persia, arose from Hnč'akean backgrounds, such as Aršawir Č'ilinkirian (Arcdhavir Tchilinkirian), Vram/Vahram P'iloSean, and Sedrak Banuorean (Kitur, 1962, I, pp. 204, 294, 396; Chaqueri, 1998, pp. 80-86, 92-101; idem, 2001, pp. 148-51, 173-82; Patmagrean, p. 18; Arēs; Dēm-T., Oct. 10, 31, 1910; Č'ilinkirian). The prominent Iranian Communist Awedis Mik'ayēlean, also known as Sultānzāda, went to a school sponsored by the party when he was young (Tēr Vardanean, p. 113; Kitur, 1962, I, p. 205).

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