



JANGALI MOVEMENT

JANGALI MOVEMENT (1915-20), a movement that took shape in the aftermath of the 1905-11 Constitutional Revolution, under the leadership of Mirz'ā Kuček Khan Jangali (q.v.), in response to the period of political decay brought about by the advent of World War I and the occupation of Iran by Anglo-Russian and Ottoman troops.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

After the suppression of the Constitutional Revolution by Tsarist forces in 1911, some 17,500 Russian troops were stationed in northern Iran. They formed, together with the Qajar's Cossack Brigade that was officered by Russians, the backbone of the newly established Russian control of the northern provinces and again exerted influence on Persian affairs. The British, however, are alleged to have exerted influence through the Anglophile Abu'l-Qāsem Khan Nāṣer-al-Molk. The Qajar politician had been educated at Oxford (1879-81), and acted between 1910 and 1914 as the regent of Aḥmad Shah. In addition, the gendarmerie (q.v.), known as Žāndāmeri-e dawlati, which had been established in 1910 with the help of Swedish officers to serve as highway patrol and rural police force, was considered to be an instrument of the British. The Anglo-Russian relations were still defined in terms of their secret agreement of 1907 that had divided Persia into British and Russian spheres of influence and defined Tehran as a neutral zone. After the outbreak of World War I, Britain and Russia pressured the Qajar government to declare war on the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire). Yet Persia declared its neutrality on 1 November 1914 because the outbreak of the war



unleashed political forces that tried to secure the constitution.

A number of factors allowed for the re-emergence of the constitutionalists. The first was the withdrawal of a large number of Russian troops in August 1914 for the purpose of reinforcing the Caucasian front (Nikitin, p. 38), while pursuing a less oppressive policy in Iran. A contributory factor was the end of Nāṣer-al-Molk's regency with the coronation of Solṭān Aḥmad Mirzā on 21 July 1914. During the crisis period of 1911 to 1914 the regent had clamped down on the Democratic Party, and by 1914 the Party was on the verge of collapse. Under Aḥmad Shah's reign, the more moderate and liberal-minded statesman, Mostawfi-al-Mamālek, was appointed as prime minister and formed his cabinet in Tehran. On 5 December 1914, the Third Parliament was finally inaugurated and started its work in early January 1915. Now Ottoman and German intrigue and propaganda entered the scene because the parliament soon became an important center of anti-Entente (Britain, France, Russia) activity and pro-German agitation increased (Dailami, 1994, pp. 28-31). It was in the wake of these events, in early 1915, that Russia and Britain drew closer together and came to a full accord with regard to Persia. They signed a new secret agreement in which the neutral zone was added to the British sphere of influence and in return Russia was given a free hand in the northern provinces. Britain no longer opposed Russian efforts to bring those provinces under its control (Miroshnikov, pp. 52-53).

In Tehran, German and Ottoman agitation reached its height in the summer of 1915. German diplomats had established firm contact with leading politicians, many of whom were members of the Democratic Party. A hysterically pro-German atmosphere was created in the capital. In the autumn of 1915, the Germans stepped up their pressure and prepared for the final stage. Some 2,000 gendarmes gathered in Tehran and demanded their unpaid wages. A large number of armed recruits camped outside Tehran, following in the footsteps of the constitutional revolutionaries, as a sign of their readiness to attack the capital. Arms and ammunition were smuggled into Tehran, and plans were made to disarm the Qajar's Cossack Brigade (FO 248/1120: Marling's memo, "Turkish soldiers in Tehran," 22 Oct. 1915; cf. Miroshnikov, p. 53). The Democratic Party increased their pressure on the premier, Mostawfi-al-Mamālek, who began negotiating a Persian-German treaty with the German minister Prinz Heinrich zu Reuss (1879-1942).

Russia, alarmed by a possible Persian declaration of war on the Entente, dispatched a large force under General Nikolai Baratov (1864-1932), and one of



its divisions quickly marched to Karaj, thus threatening Tehran. Mostawfi-al-Mamālek decided to move the government and the shah to Isfahan (Bahār, pp. 17-18). This decision triggered the famous migration (*mohājerat*) of the deputies and political activists, the Swedish-officered gendarmerie, which had eventually sided with Germany after the outbreak of the war, and most German, Austrian and Ottoman diplomats, as well as a section of the population. They moved south, leaving Tehran for Qom, yet in the end Mostawfi and the shah remained in Tehran. The emigrants (*mohājerun*) declared war on the Entente, and fought until early 1917 when the Russian army dispersed them in Mesopotamia (Gehrke, tr., I, pp. 228-80).

Subsequent to the suppression of the constitutionalists in 1911, Russian policy had indicated that Russia hoped to secure long-term control of the northern provinces. Russians bought vast tracts of land from the Iranians, and the policy of settling Russian peasants in the Caucasus was extended to include Iran. Russian exports doubled, and their consulate collected taxes for its government (Kazemzadeh, pp. 676-77; Entner, pp. 41, 57). The cornerstone of Russian power was its army and, on the whole, Russian policy in Gilān can be characterized as consisting of little diplomacy and much brute force through which Russia had come to gain almost total control of Gilān's administration during the crisis period from 1911 to 1914 (Kazemzadeh, p. 676). However, the approaching war presented new problems. Russia began to concentrate troops on her Ottoman frontier in the Caucasus, and moved her occupation forces from northern Iran. Moreover, the Russian authorities were instructed to adopt a more relaxed attitude towards the population whose discontent the army could barely control. But Gilān's administration completely collapsed when in August 1914 the Russian forces left for the Caucasus. Chaos ensued, and even the Qajar governors refused to uphold the law and enforce order without the protection of the Russian army. Disobedience began in mild forms. There were collective complaints about landlords and Russian agents, and a few industrial strikes took place. But by the beginning of 1915, Gilān was the scene of widespread unrest. Peasants and city dwellers were firing their weapons at the few hundred Russian soldiers still stationed in the province, while even more forces were called to the Caucasian front (FO 248/1117: Resht news, 4 April 1915).

THE ORIGINS OF THE JANGALI MOVEMENT

Mirzā Kuček Khan became a revolutionary leader because he adapted to this revolutionary situation, exploiting rather than initiating fortuitous



circumstances. In his youth he had been a religious student, but in 1908 he abandoned his religious career and joined the constitutionalist social-democrats. Already in 1909, he was a junior commander of the revolutionary force that attacked and captured Tehran, and two years later he was forced into internal exile. Shortly before the court's migration from Tehran to Qom, in late summer of 1915, Kuček Khan returned to Gilān when the activities of the Jangalis began. Their first group took to Gilān's forests (*jangal*) and declared that they intended to free the province of the Russian army (FO 248/1117: Maclaren to Ramsden, 19 Nov. 1915). The Jangalis quickly distinguished themselves from other bandits by trying and executing criminals. They financed themselves by abducting wealthy individual, in particular landowners, to ransom them for large sums of money.

In their dealings with peasants, they were careful to be scrupulously fair and make full payments in any transaction (Dailami, 1994, p. 44; Kazemi, 1991, p. 106). The earliest known Jangali operation took place in October 1915 when the governor of Rašt put a certain landowner, 'Abd-al-Razzāq Šafti, in charge of the district of Pasikān with a view to preventing the Jangalis from approaching Rašt. Subsequently Šafti's men were attacked and defeated by the Jangalis. Those who survived fled in disarray to Rašt. Subsequently, another big landowner, Žargām-al-Salṭana's brother, Šojā'-al-Divān, was given 200 men and sent to the forests of Fumān where he was defeated on two occasions and his men were disarmed (FO 248/1117: Maclaren to Ramsden, 19 Nov. 1915).

In the meantime, with Tehran on the brink of falling into German hands, Rašt was made the principal base of the Russian army and thousands of troops constantly passed through that city on their way from Baku to Qazvin whence operations against the Migrants were to be directed. Once the Russians were back and established in Rašt, a force of 550 Russian soldiers and 50 men of the Qajar's Cossack Brigade set out to suppress the Jangalis. That expedition failed miserably too and the Jangalis emerged victorious.

Following the defeat of the Russian expedition the Jangalis distributed clandestine broadsheets (*šab-nāmas*) in Rašt, declaring their intention to attack and capture the city. The Russians, who now had more troops at their disposal, effectively declared Martial law and in their attempt to clear Rašt of anti-Russian elements, some 160 houses were burned to the ground (FO 248/1149: Resht news, 8 Jan. 1916).

At about the same time a large number of Russian troops from Rašt, Anzali,



Manjil and Zanjān were sent on an expedition against the Jangalis, who were heavily defeated in January 1916, but Baratov's forces stopped just short of completely destroying them. According to Kuček Khan, if the Russian force had remained another few days in the region, the Jangalis would have had to surrender as many had frozen to death and the others were subsisting on a diet of grass and roots (Dailami, 1994, p. 46). Nevertheless, they regrouped within a few weeks, pursuing a defensive policy until 1917 when the February Revolution in Russia allowed them to emerge from the forests. Prior to that their force was composed of numerous petty-bourgeois city dwellers, fishermen from Anzali, itinerant seasonal agricultural workers, petty-landowners who were constantly under pressure by the bigger and more influential landowners, Turkish escapee prisoners of war, perhaps even a good number of Iranian émigrés from the Caucasus, but most important of all, the mass of poor and middle peasantry (Dailami, 1994, p. 51). To the above, we have to add the perennial presence of Bolshevik agitators from the Caucasus in Gilān.

THE JANGALIS AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

One of the shortcomings of historiography on the Jangali movement is the ignorance that concerns the activities of the Bolsheviks and the peasantry who both in fact continued to be present in Gilān. Although these have been studied in works on the Constitutional Revolution, their presence in the Jangali movement has been overlooked. Following the occupation of Gilān by the Russian army, Russian commercial activity, especially that of Khostaria, extended from industry into agriculture. Active Russian acquisition of land, the Russian's encouragement of Gilāni landowners to become Russian subjects, and their subsequent efforts to please them by suppressing the peasantry and reinforcing the old 'feudal' regime, provided the backdrop for an alliance of the peasantry, the small working class and the urban petty-bourgeoisie which included the fishermen, the city artisans and small producers whose economic position had been undermined by the great influx of Russian goods into Gilān (Abrahamian, 1979, pp. 391, 394). And it was their joint struggles that were to dominate the scene after the outbreak of the war. The collapse of administration in Gilān brought about economic stagnation, social and political insecurity and demographic instability. At this stage discontent in the countryside was to be directed against Russian interest and 'Russian agents' and once again Tāleš, the hotbed of peasant rebellions, was to be the scene of the most violent unrest. At the end of January 1915, in



retaliation for the activities of a Russian agent, “a more than usually disreputable specimen of his class,” the factories of Lianozov and Khoshtaria were burned down. (FO 248/1117: Resht news, 31 Jan. 1915). The Russian army’s retaliation caused the dislocation of the peasant population (who fled for fear of reprisals) in many parts of Gilān. Russian efforts to maintain order usually resulted in more chaos. Every single expeditionary force, both Russian and Iranian, which had set out to fight the Jangalis, made the pillaging of villages its first priority. The state of chaos in Gilān also allowed the landowners to pillage the countryside. A typical example was that of Žargām who pillaged the whole district of Fumān in November 1915 (FO 248/1117: Resht news, 24 Dec. 1915).

Russian efforts pursuing the policy of annexing Gilān, created even more discontent and contributed to the state of chaos. For instance, when a Russian government delegation arrived in Gilān to purchase land, a certain Russian subject took it upon himself to sell them a village that did not belong to him. In this case the peasants who owned the village shot the Russian subject and in retaliation the Russian consul had seven of the peasants shot and the village burnt down. The remainder of the peasants fled and abandoned the village (FO 248/1149: Maclaren to Marling, 4 Sep. 1916).

The spread of disease among livestock and specially the prevalence of cholera were also contributing factors. The little evidence that exists reveals the great extent of the problem. In December 1915, the number of fatalities in one small village between Rašt and Anzali was recorded to be 36. By April 1916, cholera caused the death of 15 people daily in the Fumān area alone (FO 248/1117: Resht news, 4 Dec. 1915; FO 248/1149: Resht news, 15 April 1916). The stage was thus set for the rapid growth of the Jangali movement, and the Russian factor resulted in an anti-imperialist alliance between the aforementioned classes.

The Gilāni revolutionaries, because of the Russian domination of the cities, inevitably based themselves in the countryside. The great mass of peasants were to form most of the Jangali fighting force, and Kuček Khan, despite the fact that he led an anti-imperialist struggle, also inevitably fostered an agrarian movement. The experience of the Constitutional Revolution shows that he was well aware of the political characteristics of the countryside where the peasantry joined the city artisans and the petty traders in the struggle. The Jangalis immediately set out to hold wealthy individuals to ransom and extracted very large sums of money from them. Apart from a few exceptions,



all of those individuals were landowners. Most of them were well known reactionary figures of the constitutional period. As it later became obvious, these actions by the Jangalis were not merely a temporary measure but were part of a long-term revolutionary policy. Those landowner-politicians who actively opposed the Jangalis, were their special targets. The Jangalis also levied tax on the landowners and at the same time tried to force them not to pay tax either to the Russian consul or the governor general of Gilān. After their initial defeat in January 1916, the Jangalis had quickly regrouped and grown into a partisan army. By December 1916, their influence had extended to the gates of Rašt and they levied tax even on lands that were on the outskirts of the provincial capital (FO 248/1149: Resht news, 3 Dec. 1916).

The landowners, who in any case had refrained from paying any proper tax since 1906, eventually declared to the authorities in Gilān that they would not pay their taxes unless the Jangalis were completely suppressed (FO 248/1149: Resht news, 18 Nov. 1916). Ever since the rise of the Jangalis they had financed and raised a number of expeditionary forces against them. All of them had failed. Finally the Russian consul, the governor general and a number of principle landowners of Gilān gathered together to orchestrate their efforts against the Jangalis and they even considered a second attempt at assassinating Kuček Khan, but on the whole they failed to produce a solution (FO 248/1149: Resht news, 10 July 1916).

Apart from holding landowners to ransom, the Jangalis also threatened to carry off the crops of others if the landowners refused to pay (FO 248/1149: Maclaren to Marling, 10 July 1916). Later on the landowners were treated even more harshly. Maclaren once reported, “180,000 tomans have already been collected by the band at Lahijan. They had prepared various instruments of torture and informed their victims that if money was not forthcoming without delay, the instruments would be employed. The threat was sufficient and instruments were not required” (FO 248/1168: Maclaren to Marling, decipher 41, 28 Dec. 1917).

The landowners were not, however, treated in a much better manner by the Iranian and Russian authorities. First of all, the anti-Jangali expeditions had not refrained from looting the properties of some landowners on their way to fight the Jangalis. The leaders of those expeditions also continued, as in the pre-1905 era, to treat even the landowners as absolute subjects. Frequent incidents reminded the men of property that they still had no legal status vis-à-vis the elite of the country who treated them as absolute subjects of a despotic



monarchy. The case of a certain Sardār Eqtedār, an aristocratic governor who arrived from Māzandarān in July 1916 to raise another expeditionary force against the Jangalis, is a typical example. Maclaren reported, “It appears that Serdar Iktidar on leaving Shahsavār, had telegraphed to the deputy governor of Lahijan to collect 100 horses for him. The horses were not ready and it so infuriated his excellency that after abusing Ḥāji Emin-ed Diwan, Muftakhar-ul Molk and Salar Muayyed, three of the largest and most distinguished landowners of the district who had come to present themselves to him, he ordered them to be beaten. On representations of some of his friends, however, he commuted the beating to a fine of 1500 tomans which was paid on the spot” (FO 248/1149: Maclaren to Marling, 10 July 1916).

General Baratov too, whose army had been subjected to rapid disintegration in the course of late 1916 and 1917, refrained from taking decisive action against the Jangalis. He also mistreated the landowners. For instance, Żargām, who continued to resist the Jangalis, was arrested by the Russian troops and General Baratov did not release him until he extracted a large sum of money from him (FO 248/1168: Maclaren to Marling, deciphers 4 and 22, 6 March and 16 July 1917, resp.). Eventually the landowners, “seeing that they would be totally ruined if they did not come to some arrangement” with the Jangalis, decided to approach Kuček Khan and submit to his authority with the hope of convincing him “to leave them something to live on.” They organized a delegation and engaged in fruitless negotiations with the Jangalis (ibid.) who continued to carry out their policy even further and in more radical forms. By the spring of 1917, when the Jangalis were in control of most of Gilān, they confiscated the land of bigger landowners who continued to resist them.

Among those landowners who lost their lands and all their property, were the aristocrats Amin-al-Dawla, and his wife princess Faqr-al-Dawla. Amin-al-Dawla was arrested after his peasants complained to the revolutionaries. Subsequently he was tried in a revolutionary court, fined 75,000 tomans and was imprisoned. His lands were confiscated and distributed among his peasants. Faqr-al-Dawla was treated in a similar manner. She managed to escape arrest by the Jangalis, but a revolutionary court confiscated all her land and property in absentia and distributed them among peasants (FO 248/1168: Maclaren to Marling, decipher 20, 15 June 1917; decipher 32, 20 August 1917; Maclaren to Scott, 29 Oct. 1917; Maclaren to Marling, 30 Oct. 1917). Indeed the Jangali movement had a prominent anti-landlord character. One of the major reasons for its success in its early years was the lack of will and decisiveness



displayed by the landowning counter-revolutionary establishment (Tamimi-Ṭāleqāni).

THE 1917 RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

As a result of the Jangali's activities in the countryside, signs of internal conflict appeared. Two reactionary heroes of the Constitutional Revolution, Ḥāji Mirzā Moḥammad-Rezā, the leader of the provincial *anjoman*, and Sālār Fāteḥ, a commander of the insurgent forces in Gilān—abandoned the new revolutionaries.

General Baratov could not maintain the high concentration of Russian troops that he had used to suppress the Jangalis in January 1916. Most of his forces would soon leave Gilān to continue the Russian offensive against the Ottomans. Apart from having to maintain control of the areas taken from the nationalist forces (Hamadan and Kermanshah), Baratov's army had to push further west on the Iranian front to put more pressure on the Ottoman forces that were about to capture Kut al-Amara in Mesopotamia. But soon, in late 1916, Kut al-Amara fell and the groundwork for the return of the nationalist forces to Iran was prepared. In June 1916, once again, the Emigrants appeared at Kermanshah, defeated the Russians and advanced up to and captured Hamadan. The Russian forces retreated to Qazvin where they were to be joined by more troops from Gilān. In the province, the main effect of the second Migrant advance was that both by sending support to the Jangalis and by engaging large numbers of Russian troops, it greatly contributed to their rise to prominence. In the autumn of 1916, just under 1,000 men were engaged in fighting the Jangalis. Most belonged to the Qajar's Cossack Brigade who had arrived from Tehran, and only 150 Russian soldiers participated in those operations (FO 248/1149: Resht news, 9 Sep. 1916; 23 Sep. 1916; 3 Dec. 1916; 23 Dec. 1916).

In December 1916, the last expedition of that period was heavily defeated and as a result the anti-Jangali forces in Gilān disintegrated. The few hundred men of the Cossack Brigade remained, but were confined to their barracks with the consent of the prime minister in Tehran. Rumors that the Jangalis were about to attack and capture the city caused great panic in Rašt (FO 248/1168: decipher 2, 31 Jan. 1917; decipher 3, 13 March 1917).

Up to the beginning of this period the Jangalis on the whole had pursued a defensive policy and had only tried to survive. The new offensive was



launched with a view to gaining and consolidating new territories. From January 1917, the Jangalis began to disarm the big and influential landowners and installed their own representatives as government officials wherever their influence was extended. Soon the February Revolution in Russia added to the encouragement that the advance of the nationalist forces into Iran had given to the Jangali movement. The Russians, in the wake of that revolution, established friendly relations with the Jangalis and signed an agreement with them that promised the eventual evacuation of their troops from Gilān. From then on, apart from a few insignificant incidents, even Tsarist diplomatic and military authorities refrained from confronting the revolutionaries. A little later, the return of Ottoman forces to Iranian Azarbaijan and their capture of Tabriz in May 1917 also facilitated their progress.

The Jangalis established themselves in Gilān in a surprisingly short time. Maclaren, the British Acting vice-consul, was probably too late in reporting in August that they had become “to all intents and purposes the masters of Gilān” (FO 248/1168: decipher 32, 20 Aug. 1917).

Throughout 1917, as the influence of the Jangalis increased, all governors and deputy governors, except those who had a history of collaboration with the Jangalis, were replaced. By August, the only exceptions to the rule were the General Governor and the Kārgozār, who as mere official figures, completely submitted to the Jangalis and worked under the supervision of their representatives. After the October Revolution in Russia, they too, as the last remaining officials of the Tehran government, were turned out of Gilān (FO 248/1168: decipher 32, 20 Aug. 1917; decipher 35, 28 Nov. 1917). At the same time the Jangalis began to disarm and bring under control those landlords who were still resisting them. This process continued throughout 1917 and found even more radical dimensions after the October Revolution (FO 248/1168: decipher 20, 15 June 1917; decipher 35, 28 Nov. 1917).

Significant social and political changes were brought about as a result of the rise of the Jangalis. Once again, popular participation in political activity increased. Public meetings were organized by a variety of political forces and *anjomans* were set up in the towns. There are signs that these were also set up in the countryside. Confiscation and distribution of land in Lašta-nešā had in fact been the result of collective efforts on the part of local peasants of the area who had gone so far as publishing a proclamation in Rašt about the oppression of their landlord, Amin-al-Dawla. A number of newspapers also appeared in the province, the most important and long lasting of them was the organ of the



Jangalis, entitled *Jangal*.

In 1917, the Jangalis carried out important reforms. They exempted the peasants (for the time being) from paying tax or dues. They took over and supervised the distribution of water to farms, a perennial source of quarrel between peasants and landlords (FO 248/1168: *Jangal*, No. 2, 17 June 1917; decipher 18, 21 May 1917; decipher 22, 16 July 1917). These measures encouraged productivity and while famine ruled in the rest of Iran, agricultural production in Gilān reached an all time high. The Jangalis in fact sent rice to famine-stricken Tehran, as well as actively feeding the besieged city of Baku in Russian Azarbaijan. The peasants also acquired legal rights and had their complaints attended to by Jangali courts that extended their services to the urban population as well (Dailami, 1994, p. 39).

In the towns more reforms were carried out in the government departments including the police force which was completely taken over. By the end of 1917, out of their revenue of 1,000,000 tomans, extracted from landlords and government departments, the Jangalis were paying 21,000 tomans per month as wages to their employees (FO 248/1168: decipher 35, 28 Nov. 1917). The rest was spent on the revolutionary army.

Throughout 1917, the Jangali movement was hampered by internal dissent. As an anti-imperialist front that included a whole array of political elements, it could not completely fulfill the aspirations of its radical activists. While the right wing of the movement under Ḥāji Aḥmad Kasmā'i (a disgruntled merchant) did not wholeheartedly oppose the central government, the left wing did, and refused to compromise. Throughout 1917, Kuček Khan stubbornly kept the main Jangali forces in the forests and refused to establish himself in Rašt. Had he done so, it would have meant that he had compromised the objectives of his movement. He was firstly concerned about the presence of Russian troops that the Provisional Government in Petrograd refused to withdraw. Even after establishing good relations with the Russians in Rašt, and signing an agreement with them that promised the evacuation of Russian troops, and despite their efforts to convince him to take up the governorship of Gilān, Kuček Khan categorically refused to leave the forest.

When the Jangalis emerged from the forests in 1917, as a result of the relaxation of Russian hostilities, they adopted the Committee of *Etteḥād-e eslām* (Union of Islam) that appears to have survived the ravages of the constitutional times, as their political arm, when the Tsarist army suppressed



the Gilāni *anjomans* in late 1911. The extent of Kuček Khan's involvement with the Committee is not clear. As it turned out he was no fan of the Turks. The radical Jangali, Esmā'il Khan, nevertheless wrote that Kuček acquired much support through the adoption of such a populist title for the Jangalis' political organization. He had acquired a "political front" (Jangali, p. 68). The Committee was, however, purged of a number of Muslim clerics before it was set to work. Nevertheless, it was dominated by the right wing (Fakrā'i, p. 96).

The newspaper *Jangal* reflected the ideas of the Committee. The writers of the paper were very much preoccupied with the war situation and the military invasion of Iran by the Entente armies, but there was very little Turkophilia in their writings. The Committee denounced Russia for continuing to occupy northern Iran with the excuse of an Ottoman threat. It also denounced the aristocracy and corrupt officials who opposed reform. It even supported Aḥmad Shah until late 1917, when the Bolshevik Revolution brought about radical change into Iranian politics. Of course, at the time this was the policy of all insurgent Iranians, such as Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh, the leader of the Democratic Party, and Ḥaydar Khan 'Amu-oḡli, the most radical figure in Iranian politics of the time (Dailami, 2004, p. 96). While the Jangalis demanded elections to reopen the suppressed Majles, they did not cease pushing for government reforms. There is no sign that any faction of the Jangalis hoped to establish an Islamic theocracy in Gilān or in Iran (Dailami, forthcoming). No Muslim cleric was ever to play a role in the leadership of the movement. Nor were the clerics given a privileged position in the Gilāni society or in the movement. Some were even persecuted and imprisoned by the Jangalis (Afšār, 1984, pp. 363-64).

The radicals of the movement went along with the populism of Etteḥād-e eslām Committee. They carried out their agrarian policy with great vigor but played down their underpinning ideological doctrines for the time being. What kept the movement together were the military occupation of the Iranian territory and the common anti-imperialist aspirations of the revolutionaries.

In practice, the Jangalis defied the Shah and the central government but this was not the attitude of the entire movement. For the time being, however, it was the Russians who had to be dealt with. In 1917, the process of the disintegration of the Russian army reached a sensitive point. The signs of this process were visible ever since Baratov's army had entered northern Iran. Mutinies were reported as early as the autumn of 1915 and the Russian authorities were never in sufficient control of their troops. By late 1916,



Russian policy in Gilān was practically abandoned and in the wake of the February Revolution, there was an eruption of political activity among Russian soldiers. The governor of Rašt reported to Tehran that “Russian subjects and soldiers” participated in political meetings “with such strange ferocity that even their leaders were unable to restrain them” (*Jangal*, No. 3, 24 June 1917, p. 4).

In 1917, a Russian ‘Executive Committee’ was formed in Gilān that included Russians, Georgians and Azarbaijanis. In May of that year, the Committee, independently of General Baratov, sent a delegation to Fumān to meet and fraternize with the Jangalis. It was led by the Georgian officer Polkovnik (Major) Dzhardzhadze, and included two Azeris, and was accompanied by the Jangalis’ representative in Rašt, ‘Ezzat-Allāh Hedāyat. They met Kuček Khan and three other Jangali leaders at one of the schools that had been established for peasant children. They celebrated a new relationship, exchanged presents, and in Rašt the Executive Committee “praised Mirza Kuchik Khan in the most extravagant terms . . . [and declared] that he ought to be made Governor General of Gilān” (FO 248/1203: decipher 18, 21 May 1917). The negotiations were followed up in August when the two sides agreed that Russian evacuation could be delayed to prevent a British takeover of Gilān and allow the Jangalis to strengthen themselves further (Dailami, 1994, pp. 42-43).

RADICALISM AND THE CRISIS OF NATIONALISM

Shortly after the October Revolution in Russia, the Bolsheviks declared the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 null and void. They also promised the withdrawal of Russian troops from Iranian territory. They immediately tried to enter into official diplomatic negotiations with the Persian government. They signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany that allowed for the actual realization of Russian evacuation. All of the above was in line with the aspirations of the Iranian patriots who had campaigned and fought for that since the outbreak of World War I (Dailami, 1999, pp. 63-65). The Iranian socialist leader, Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh, was prompted to send a telegram to the Petrograd Soviet, thanking the Bolsheviks for their actions with regard to Iran.

The Jangalis, too, praised the Bolsheviks for their respect for Iranian sovereignty. In the immediate wake of the October Revolution a number of changes took place in Gilān. First of all, the Jangalis took steps towards monopolizing political power. Some political organizations (such as the



terrorist groups) were suppressed while others were absorbed into the movement. It was also at that stage that the Jangalis officially turned against the monarchy. Also at that stage came the formal demand for division of land among peasants. And finally, the Jangalis were to strike a firm alliance with the Bolsheviks in Gilān.

Within the Iranian context the Jangalis relations with the government and the landowners, are most important. While they took over virtually all government departments, their persecution of landowners intensified (FO 248/1168: Maclaren, report 35, 25 Nov. 1917).

In early 1918, the Jangalis sent emissaries to various parts of Iran and southern Russia to rally support and negotiate with potential allies. They recruited volunteers for the partisan army, gathered arms in Tehran and formed numerous secret cells in the capital for the purpose of seizing power.

Indeed the Jangalis intended to move on Tehran. Esmā'il Khan Jangali, the radical and prominent leader of the movement confirms that the Gilāni partisans had the intention of moving on Tehran. However, he does not explain how they wanted to seize power. The little evidence that is available suggests that they hoped to capture Tehran in the same way that they had during the Constitutional Revolution—that is with the collaboration of other forces such as the Azarbaijanis and the Baḳtiāris (Dailami, 1994, pp. 102-6), but the Azeris had been suppressed by the Ottomans and the Bakhtiaris were under the influence of the British. Soon, in a letter to the Turkish diplomat and alleged master-spy 'Obayd-Allāh Efendi, Kuček Khan wrote that he considered the prerequisite to the seizure of power in Tehran an alliance of Gilān, Iranian Azarbaijan, and Caucasian Bolsheviks (Dailami, 1992, p. 55).

By early 1918, the Jangalis had formed a revolutionary army that has been estimated to have numbered between 3,000 and 8,000 men, but the turn of events did not allow for the pre-conditions of revolution. The consequences of any unilateral seizure of power on the part of the Jangalis cannot easily be assessed. On the other hand, Kuček Khan was a perfectionist and he hesitated to move on Tehran. Hence, despite pressures from some Jangali left-wingers and Turkish agents in Tehran, he did not take that step. It is ironic that while the Turks urged Kuček Khan to seize power in Tehran, they practically prevented him from doing so by their attempt to annex Iranian Azarbaijan and by their siege of Bolshevik Baku. In addition, they suppressed the Democratic Party in Tabriz. Their siege of Baku prevented the formation of



any effective alliance between the Jangalis and the Baku Bolsheviks (Dailami, 2006, pp. 152-54).

Moreover, the Jangalis did not have much time. Soon afterwards a British expeditionary force, under General Lionel Charles Dunsterville, arrived in Gilān. Before November 1917, the British had little interest in Gilān; but after that date, their interest was aroused by the evacuation of Gilān. It was now feasible for northern Iran to come under British control and Gilān could become a base for launching expeditionary forces to Transcaucasia. Thus January 1918 saw the formation of the Dunster force in Baghdad, which had fallen into British hands in March 1917. The destination of the Dunster force, as originally planned, was to be Tiflis but this plan was soon changed and Dunsterville was ordered to proceed to Baku to participate in the defense of the city against the Ottomans. The British force had to pass through Gilān to reach the Caucasus. It reached Qazvin on 15 February and there it had to halt to assess the situation. Dunsterville states in his memoirs that at this stage, “Kuchik had vowed not to let the British through and his committee were working at Enzeli in conjunction with the Bolshevik Committee who were equally determined not to allow our passage” (Dunsterville, p. 27).

A detachment of the Dunster force arrived and stayed briefly in Anzali, before returning to Qazvin and later to Hamadān. The Jangali-British antagonism, however, intensified later. In response to the British kidnapping and hostage taking of Solaymān Mirzā Eskandari, the Democrat leader and a “migrant” (*mohājjer*) member of the Iranian Parliament, the Jangalis arrested the British acting vice-consul, Charles Maclaren, and the British agents, Major Noel Oakshot and Captain Edmond Noel, in conjunction with the Bolsheviks in Baku and their representatives in the Anzali Revolutionary Committee. The Jangalis demanded the release of Solaymān Mirzā (FO 248/1212: Cox to Balfour, 13 April 1918).

In the meantime, Dunsterville managed to bring under British pay a counter-revolutionary Russian Colonel, Bicherakhov, with his 1,200 soldiers. The Jangalis had reached an agreement with the Bolsheviks that Bicherakhov could pass through Gilān to go to Baku but as yet the Bolshevik dominated Baku Soviet did not want the British forces in the city and the Dunster force had to be kept back. But as it turned out, not all of the 1,000 strong forces in Anzali were under the control of the Revolutionary Committee. A great number of them were Dašnaks who had secretly reached an agreement with Dunsterville as he reached Qazvin once again. They rescued Maclaren and



Oakshot allowing the combined Dunster force-Bicherakhov force to attack the Jangali positions at Manjil (Dailami, 1994, pp. 113-18). Subsequently, the Dunster force established itself in Rašt.

It should be added that the political situation in Baku had also changed and Dunsterville planned to go to Baku with the greater part of his force as soon as conditions permitted. On 25 July 1918, frightened by the approach of the Ottoman-Azeri “Army of Islam,” the non-Bolshevik forces in the Baku Soviet narrowly passed a resolution to ask for British help. The Bolsheviks retaliated by resigning and on 31 July, the Dašnaks, the Russian Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks formed the Centro-Caspian Directorate and invited the British to Baku, and this was promptly accepted. The Jangalis lost hope with the political situation in the whole of Iran and the Caucasus. They were also alarmed by the Ottoman advances into Iranian Azarbaijan and their siege of Baku which brought about the collapse of the thus far amicable Jangali-Bolshevik alliance. They thus came to terms with the British and signed an agreement with them on 12 August 1918 (Fakhraei, pp. 153-57).

As a result, the twelve German and Austrian officers who drilled Jangali partisans were expelled from Gilān. Yet, in fact, the Jangalis’ relations with the Germans improved after the Anglo-Jangali agreement. Kuček Khan contacted the German Caucasus Mission under General von Kress, who in turn sent large amounts of arms and ammunition (Dailami, 2006, pp. 150-52).

However, the Jangalis’ relationship with the Bolsheviks was more important and lasted much longer, although it was temporarily impaired in late 1918. As in the case of the Constitutional Revolution, the Bolsheviks were present in Gilān since 1915 when the movement began. Among their agitators were figures who later became well-known personalities in Soviet politics. Best known were the Georgians Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Budu Mdivani (Dailami, 1990, pp. 44-45).

After the October Revolution and the proclamation of friendly overtures, the Bolsheviks organized themselves in Gilān. In December 1917, a Revolutionary Committee was formed at Anzali that consisted of Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries (Miroshnikov, p. 82). Their leader was Anton Cheliablin, and the secretary of the committee was I. O. Kolomiitsev who later became the second Bolshevik diplomatic representative in Tehran. At the time, a number of soldier committees and left-wing political cells were also formed in Gilān. There were, however, in Gilān also White Russians and supporters of the



Provisional Government, and this made it difficult to impose complete control over the Russian soldiers (Dailami, 1990, p. 46; 1992, pp. 55-56). The power of the Revolutionary Committee in Gilān depended entirely on the strength of the Bolsheviks in Baku. However, although the Bolsheviks had dominated the political scene and had assumed the leadership of the Baku Soviet, they were yet to capture political power in its entirety. In the Baku Soviet there were a whole array of political parties that represented various interests and the Soviet had, in turn, rivals in the city in the organizations of the Duma and the Executive Committee of Public Organizations (IKOO). At a later stage, new political forces emerged so that the Bolsheviks had to share and contend for power with Armenian and Azarbaijani nationalists. A simplified version of this complexity of political relations was reflected in Gilān, where an “Executive Committee,” probably attached to the IKOO, competed with the Revolutionary Committee for power and the control of Russian troops. The Bolshevik Committee was thus in a position of relative weakness in Gilān and was not always capable of controlling the activities of Russian soldiers. This situation continued until early April 1918, when the Bolsheviks seized power and established a Soviet government known as the Baku Commune. Subsequently, the number of Red Guards in Gilān increased to some 1,000. A great number of them were in fact Dašnak fighters who had joined forces with the Bolsheviks in Baku.

For the time being, as the Dunster force approached Gilān, the Jangalis could not come to an agreement with the Executive Committee about the British. They thus allowed 15 days grace for the Dunster force to pass through on its way to Baku (Dailami, 1992, pp. 56-57). At the same time, the Jangalis sent a delegation to Baku where they met the Azeri Bolshevik, Nariman Narimanov, and the Commune’s leader, Stepan Shahumian. Baku was in any case unable to help much against the British threat as itself was under siege by the Ottoman army (Dailami, 1992, pp. 59-60).

In any case, as the Dašnaks infiltrated the Bolshevik forces in Gilān and as the British prisoners were rescued at the time of the battle of Manjil, the Jangali-Bolshevik alliance collapsed. In the end the Revolutionary Committee did not last long either. Its life was very much dependent on the life of the Baku Commune. Once the government of the Commune collapsed, the Red Guards who were stationed at Anzali, returned to Baku. In August 1918, according to the intelligence reports of the British War Office, proof was found that the members of the Committee were working for Kuček Khan. Subsequently, the



British, who had by then established themselves in Gilān, arrested Cheliabin and his comrades and deported them to Mesopotamia (Dailami, 1990, p. 50).

At about the same time, the frenzy brought about by the Bolshevik Revolution, finally settled in Iran. The British were now in control of most of the Iranian territory and on 7 August 1918, the Anglophile cabinet of Woṭuq-al-Dawla came to power. The end of the Great War was near. The pan-Islamists in the Jangali movement were forced to come to terms with the British and reject Turkish overtures once and for all. At that stage, the Committee of Etteḥād-e Eslām was dissolved in Gilān and the Jangalis bade farewell to pan-Islamism (Chaquèrie, 1984, p. 14; 1995, p. 67; Dailami, forthcoming).

Ideological and organizational development. After the agreement with the British and the dissolution of the Etteḥād-e Eslām Committee, the Jangali movement entered a period of decline and ideological transformation. The above two events represented crises after which the movement had to define its goals anew. Discarding the last remnants of Ottoman influence appears to have been a unanimous decision. While the Left was deeply disillusioned with Turkish actions in Iranian Azarbaijan and the Caucasus, the imminent defeat of the Central Powers in the war was enough for the Right who did not want to continue with the movement anymore. They wished to submit to British domination while the Left considered itself to be in a state of armed truce with the newcomers.

The differences led to new elections for the leadership of the movement and the right-wingers lost. After a few days the leader of the Right, Ḥāji Aḥmad Kasmā'i, once again expressed discontent and by the end of December 1918, having taken advantage of Kuček's absence, they resolved to come to terms with the Tehran government (FO 248/1203: APO in Resht to political officer Norperforce in Qazvin, 9 Dec. 1918; Oakshot, 28/29 Dec. 1918). Kasmā'i had already made it clear that he wished to surrender. He was also interested to take as much of the movement with him as possible (FO 248/1203: Oakshot to Percy Cox, 11 Dec. 1918). He secretly obtained a pardon from Tehran and accepted the government's conditions, which included the takeover of 2,000 Jangali partisans and their arms. When Kuček Khan returned from his Ṭāleš expedition and found out about the negotiations, he expressed his anger with the right-wingers and demanded fresh negotiations and the prior opening of the Majles. He also rejected British offers of the governorship of Gilān (FO 248/1243: Warren in Resht, 26 Jan. 1919; Wickham in Resht, decipher R2, 7/8 Feb. 1919). Before the breakdown in negotiations, the British had already



decided to attack the Jangalis and afterwards had the central government under Woṭuq-al-Dawla deliver an ultimatum to them. They also began agitating against the Jangalis among the powerful landlords (Dailami, 1994, pp. 148-50).

Action against the revolutionaries started on 29 March 1919, when a detachment of British troops entered Rašt. Landowners and the Mullahs came out in full force to support the British. The Mullahs of Rašt began preaching against the Jangalis in mosques (FO 248/1241: Tehran intelligence summary 22, 31 March 1918; FO 248/1243: Political officer in Qazvin to British minister in Tehran, 6 May 1919). The landowners were quick to organize themselves. Sepahsālār assembled a large force in Tonokābon and the lords of Ṭavāleš headed by Żargām-al-Salṭana drove Jangali officials out and attacked the revolutionary forces.

At about the same time the split in the movement deepened. In early February 1919, after Ḥāji Aḥmad made efforts to surrender, the left-wing Jangalis formed a committee that they called the “Bolshevik Committee.” This committee, it appears, even presented a radical program to the movement. Better-known members of the Committee included Dr. Hešmat, Eskandar Khan, Mirzā Esmā‘il Jangali, Mirzā Moḥammad, and Ehsān-Allāh Khan Dustdār (FO 248/1243: Extract from Resht situation report 2, 20 Feb. 1919). Kuček Khan did not join the Bolshevik Committee and instead offered to its reconciling members a “Socialist Committee,” formed under the influence of the left wing of the Democratic Party, the *Żedd-e taškili*, who had just arrived in Gilān to form their political committees (FO 248/1260: Priority decipher 21, 17 Feb. 1919; Resht situation report 2, 20 Feb. 1919). While Kuček Khan expressed his loyalty to the members of the *Żedd-e taškili*, which had found fresh vigor in early 1919 with leaders such as Sayyed Ḥasan Taqizādeh in Berlin and the notorious revolutionary, Ḥaydar Khan ‘Amu-oḡli in Petrograd, he also showed that he had bade farewell to his “Islam” once and for all. The British Political Officer at Qazvin described the details of a conversation with Kuček Khan in the following manner: “He told me . . . after studying in the local Madresa, he became an Akhund. He seemed to regard this as an enormous jest, his solemn fanatical countenance became wreathed in smiles and his bulky frame heaved with inward mirth as he confessed to his former calling” (FO 248/1243: Political officer in Qazvin, 10 Feb. 1919). Kuček apologized for his own distant religious past but he did not apologize for the Etteḥād-e Eslām. As a staunch populist (he was a popular leader) Kuček Khan



had rallied a whole array of political forces and disgruntled classes around himself. An aspect of his populism was his moral correctness in handling the religious and the quasi-national sentiment of the populace with care, and he followed that policy until the end of the soviet republic that he established in June 1920. He was successful in luring the revolution from anti-imperialism to socialist republicanism and he had done so by appealing to numerous discontented forces. The heterogeneous nature of the movement that he led is now reflected in the radical variety of historiography on the subject, reminiscences and books that vary from Islamic fundamentalism to Bolshevism (Dailami, 2006, pp. 138, 207-8).

In the course of internal arguments, the composition of the political organization of the Jangalis appears to have changed a number of times but even that did not consolidate the anti-imperialist front. Kuček Khan came out with the idea of resurrecting the old provincial council (*anjoman-e ayālati*) of the constitutional times. That implied holding elections although his popularity was at an all time low. Tehran promptly instructed the Governor to prevent the elections for the Society from being held (FO 248/1260: Resht situation report 10, 26 March 1919). Negotiations continued for a few more days but after all it was too late. The combined offensive of Qajar and British troops began, and at the end of March 1919, the British delivered their ultimatum to the Jangalis who were demanding their surrender.

The offensive was a military success as those who did not surrender, could not fight either. Before the Jangali Right and Left could get to fighting each other and thus ensuring the end of the movement, the partisan army was dismissed and it melted into the countryside, only to reassemble at a later date.

A number of factors helped the Jangalis to regroup. The populace, after a few years, once again tasted the oppression of the landlords and the Qajar's Cossack Brigade. Hence, partisans and peasants, once again joined the surviving leaders. Furthermore, in August 1919, came the all-Iranian popular discontent with the Anglo-Persian agreement, giving a major boost to the movement (Dailami, 1994, p. 75). But before all that, as early as June, Bolshevik emissaries had begun to infiltrate the province from the Caucasus. The most solid evidence was discovered in July when the Bolsheviks and Iranian communists sent a certain Stepan Afonian to Gilān to seek Jangali assistance in order to 'organize' the Iranian Communist Party in the province. Afonian and others established themselves there and supported the Jangalis while establishing contact between Gilān, Baku, and Tiflis (Dailami, 1990, p. 52).



Soon afterwards, for the second time, the Lankarān communists contacted Kuček Khan, and in August 1919, he set out to meet them there. By the time he reached the area the Caucasian revolutionaries had been driven out by counter-revolutionaries. At the same time, Bolshevik emissaries from Turkistan also arrived in Gilān (Dailami, 1990, p. 53). The involvement of the Baku Bolsheviks and communists in Gilān during 1919 and early 1920 became the central theme in the Jangali story. At the end of the summer of 1919, the Jangali Bolshevik, Mirzā Esmā'īl, was sent to Transcaucasia (FO 248/1260: APO in Enzeli, 21 Sept. 1919; political officer in Resht, 18 Oct. 1919; Enzeli situation report 3, 12 Oct. 1919). After that date, British reports repeatedly spoke of the resurrection of the Jangali movement in collusion with the Bolsheviks. The arrival of the northern radicals had become a foregone conclusion. The British and Tehran decided to try to prop up Kuček Khan against the Bolsheviks. The 11th Red Army, having entered Baku on 28 April 1920, landed in Gilān on 18 May and the Bolsheviks were welcomed by the Jangalis.

The Jangalis Socialist Committee constituted itself into the Socialist Party in the wake of the Bolshevik landing and adopted a program that included demands for internationalism as well as the separation of religion from politics (Gilak, pp. 527-29; Faḵrā'i, pp. 56-59). The political demands of the radical leaders of the Jangali movement eventually culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Republic of Gilān on 5 June 1920.

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