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Taqi Arani and the Comintern: The Revolutionary Republican Party of Persia in the 1920s and 1930s

Ever since the foundation in December 1941, the Tudeh party had been associated with Communism in Iran. Many have assumed that it had always been Iran's left-wing organization. This »mistake« was due to the obliteration of the history of the Iranian Communist Party by the Stalinist apparatus as well as the military dictatorship in Iran. For the same reason, the name of Taqi Arani has been mistakenly associated with the Tudeh party. Arani died in February 1940 while the Tudeh was founded, nearly two years later, in December 1941, after the occupation of Iran by the Anglo-Soviet forces. Arani's group of the 1930's as well as the ICP, with which Arani had some contact, had been dismantled by the Soviets in the 1930s. For obvious reasons. The ICP had, in its majority, refused to submit to the authority of Stalin and his men, and Arani had been, from the beginning, a non-Soviet Marxist. Yet, as of 1942, it was convenient to use the name of Arani as a »martyr« of the Tudeh party for the cause of Stalinist version of communism. In this short article I summarize the essential story of Arani's first attempt in mid 1920s, while he was still a student in Berlin, to create a Marxist group, the Revolutionary Republican Party of Persia (RRPP).

Formation of the RRPP

Due to the suppression of the Comintern and Iranian CP archives, we knew, until recently, very little about the origins of RRPP.¹ Even recent limited access to the said archives has not fully clarified the circumstances of, and the exact motivations for, the establishment of this new »crypto«-communist organization. In other words, in spite of a mild criticism of it years later by the ICP, we do not as yet know exactly whether it was the ICP that was discretely at the origin of the

¹ For early references to, and some documents of, the RRPP, see C. Chaqueri, *Historical Documents: The Workers', Social-Democratic, and Communist Movement in Iran*, 23 vols., Florence and Tehran, 1969–1994, vols. 6 and 9, published in 1975 and 1983, respectively. The RRPP does not appear to have been a revival of the Workers-Peasants Party, which Irandust affirms the founded of in 1923–1924 in connection with the republican movement. V. Osetrov, »Klassy i Partii Sovermennoi Persii«, *Mirovoe Khoziaistvo i Mirovaia Politika*, no. 2, 1926, p. 87.

creation of the RRPP, or individual Communists close to the ICP and the German CP (KPD) who took the initiative to establish the new organization. Nonetheless, the information available, even before the openings of the said archives, was sufficient to permit us to trace some of its activities and impact on Iran's external relations as well as its internal politics, both short term and long term.² A short spell of access to Soviet archives, however, has thrown new lights on the foundation of the RRPP, to which we have devoted the first part of a book on Arani.³ This organization was in close contact with the Liga gegen Imperialismus created on Münzenberg's initiative,⁴ which held its first congress in Brussels in February 1927.⁵

It was in connection with preparations for the founding of this League, it seems, that the Iranians revolutionary students in Berlin, either members of the ICP or closely associated with it, took the initiative to create the RRPP. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that Iran's internal situation had strongly affected both these radical Iranian students as well as the veterans of the SSRI exiled in Baku. Particularly the popular, spontaneous, triple uprisings in Khorasan, Gilan and Azerbaijan⁶ must have strengthened the resolve of these elements abroad, justifying the creation of new organizations that could appeal to the discontented masses who were being increasingly pushed into opposition to the new shah.

Commencing its activities in 1926, the RRPP carried them out among students very discretely, except perhaps in Berlin, where there had existed a student com-

² For an early study of the RRPP, see K. Shakeri [Chaqueri], *Le Parti Communiste Iranien, Genèse, Développement, et Fin, 1916–1932*, doct. diss., Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, 1980, chap. 5.

³ See C. Chaqueri, *The Tragedy of Iranian Dissident Communists*, forthcoming.

⁴ For the history of the creation of the League, see M. Dreyfus, «La Ligue contre l'Impérialisme et l'Oppression coloniale», *Communisme*, no. 2, 1982, pp. 49–55; idem, «Willi Münzenberg et les organisations de masse proches du Komintern (1925–1936)», in: Willi Münzenberg, 1889–1940. *Un homme contre* (Actes du Colloque International, Aix-en-Provence, 26–29 March 1992), Aix-en-Provence, 1993. See also M. Haikal «Willi Münzenberg et la ligue contre l'impérialisme et pour l'indépendance nationale», in: Willi Münzenberg, 1889–1940. A more detailed, well-researched, and analytical study by M. Haikal («Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit, 1927–1937») presented at the IISH Conference on the Comintern in Fall 1992, unpublished.

⁵ For the proceedings of the congress, see *Liga gegen Imperialismus, Das Flammenzeichen von Palais Egmont, Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus*, Berlin, 1927; see also *La Correspondance Internationale*, no. 64, 1926, pp. 723–24; W. Münzenberg, «The First International Congress against Imperialist Colonisation», *International Press Correspondence*, no. 12, 4 February 1927, pp. 216–17. Idem, «Le Congrès de Bruxelles contre l'Impérialisme et l'Oppression coloniale», *La Correspondance Internationale*, no. 26, 23 February 1927. «The Brussels Conference of the League against Imperialism», in *ibid.*, no. 71, 15 December 1927, pp. 1622–23.

⁶ For the analysis of these three movements, see C. Chaqueri, «Pishinehâ-ye Jonbesh-e Anjomanin», *Ketâb-e Jom'ehhâ*, no. 4, 1985, and idem, *Victims of Faith, Iranian Communists and Soviet Russia, 1917–1940*, forthcoming.

munity whose prominent leader was Taqi Arani, himself one of the founders of the RRPP. Here, too, the paucity of information regarding contacts and organizational work deprives us of the possibility of precisely tracing and reconstructing RRPP's early activities in detail. But according to Dr. Arani's »confessions« during interrogations by the Pahlavi police in Tehran in April 1937, the RRPP had been an outgrowth of the organization called Anjoman-e Iran, founded by Iranian students resident in Berlin. In Arani's words, the RRPP was founded as a »secret party« by the radical members of the aforementioned union, namely, Ahmad Assadov and Morteza Alavi, both of whom at the time were communists; Ali Ardalân, who later joined Mosaddeq's movement and was appointed in 1979 member of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Provisional Government under Mehdi Bazargan; Mohammed Bahrâmi and Mohammed Yazdi, both of whom were arrested as members of »Arani's Group« in 1937 and later became Tudeh party leaders in the 1940s but defected to the shah after the 1953 coup; Mahmoud Pour-Reza and Ebrâhim Mahdavi, both of whom Arani described as »somewhat socialistic«;⁷ Mansour Rokni;⁸ Morteza Alavi's father;⁹ and Taqi Arani himself.

Moreover, Arani intentionally – and understandably – gave an inaccurate picture of the organization to police interrogators. First, that the RRPP had disappeared by the year 1928 because of its lack of ideological homogeneity.¹⁰ Second, the RRPP was »absolutely not communist«, but »to some extent *melli* [patriotic]« whose program was to preserve the principles of democracy. This was the very opposite of what Morteza Alavi had admitted, in ostensibly dissimilar circumstances and with apparently different expectations as to the consequences, to the Berlin Polizeipräsidium. He had said to have belonged to a group, which in word and letter stands in opposition to the prevailing, feudal-absolutist [social] relations and which strives for their abolition as well as for the industrial development of the country on a collectivist (thus, communistic) basis. The organ of this group, which had previously designated itself as the »Revolutionary Republican« or the »Communist Party of Persia«, was the monthly *Setâreh-ye Sorkh* (Red Star),¹¹ and now, since the beginning of February of this year, is the bi-weekly *Paykar* (Com-

⁷ »Bâzjou'i az Doktor Arani« at the Tehran Police in 1937; in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar, ed. H. Farzâneh, Tehran, 1994, p. 236.

⁸ In a letter dated 5 December 1933, sent by Rokni to Avetis Sultanzade, Morteza Alavi, and Zarreh (Abolqasem Sajjadi), he reported on his own communist activities at the German university where he was a student. See Russian Centre for the Preservation and Studie of Documents of Most Recent History (RT'sKhIDNI), 495/90/211.

⁹ Alavi's father, Abol-Hasan Alavi, who had been the son of a Majles deputy. He emigrated to Germany and committed suicide in 1927, apparently for reasons of financial difficulties.

¹⁰ Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 236.

¹¹ Organ of the Iranian CP; for reproductions of its issues, see Chaqueri, Historical Documents (footnote 1), vols. 6, 21, 22, and 23.

bat).¹² In spite of the »dissolution« of the organization, however – Arani added during his interrogations –, Morteza Alavi continued to publish RRPP broadsheets. The »former members« aware of Alavi's activities in the name of the RRPP, nonetheless, did not cease to assist him financially¹³ – a fact that is confirmed by documents in the German archives (see below). The above sketch of the RRPP as a creation of revolutionary Iranian students is no more than a truncated version of the organization's history told under duress during police interrogations. It should be revised and completed as follows.

Taqi Arani, Iran's Prominent Marxist in the 1930s

He was born on 5 September (or 21 March)¹⁴ 1902 into the family of Abol-Fath Khan, a middle-rank administrator of government finances,¹⁵ whose ancestors had moved to the Azerbaijani provincial capital Tabriz from north of the Aras River, Ar[r]jan, hence his family name Arani (or Erani as he spelled it).

He received his primary education at Sharaf High School. He then attended Dar al-Fonoun (equivalent to a German Ober-Realschule) between 1914 and 1920 and received his diploma in medicine as the »top student« (*bester Student*). Then he went to the Higher School of Medicine in Tehran and passed his exams successfully. In 1922, he left for Berlin. In summer 1923 he enrolled at the Philosophy Faculty and studied as an ordinary student for ten consecutive semesters. In winter semester 1924/25, he sat his *Verband* exams and in winter semester 1925/26 he took his doctoral exams. In summer 1926 he began his doctoral dissertation and terminated it in Winter 1927/28. He attended lectures, among other, by Max Planck and Albert Einstein. He also worked as a lecturer (*Lektor*) for Persian in the Orientalisches Seminar that defrayed him his student fees.¹⁶ His Dissertation in chemistry was titled *Die reduzierenden Wirkungen der unterphos-*

¹² For reproductions, see *ibid.* For Alavi's interrogation by the German police, see Report to the Prussian Minister of Interior, dated 28 August 1931, Auswärtiges Amt, Abt. III, Akt. betr. Sozialismus, Bolschewismus, Kommunismus, usw., Bd. 1, Persien, 1929–1934.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ In a typewritten statement for the university he notes that he was born on 21 March 1902 not 5 September. (p. 552 of his file at Humboldt University, Berlin). There is no file number for this at the university.

¹⁵ While Abdol-Samad Kambakhsh in his »Secret Report« (RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/194) falsely told the Comintern that Arani had come from a »especially rich family«, having inherited »a house from his father, a small parcel of land, and a small portion of a coal mine« (with the connotation that he might have exploited mine workers), another Tudeh leader (Agahi »Dokotr Arani ...« *Donya*, no. 5, 1979, p. 150) stated, for propaganda purposes, that Arani had issued from the family of a »petty employee« of the Finance Department.

¹⁶ M. Golbon and Y. Sharifi (Mohakemeh-ye Mohakemehgaran [The Trial of Judges], Tehran, 1984, p. 200) state that he was »Professor« at Berlin, which is incorrect.

phorigen Säure auf organische Verbindungen, which he defended on 19 December 1928. According to his professor, his German as expressed in his dissertation was awkward (*ungewandt*) and needed revision. In an official letter by him in May 1928 to the university, he suffered from pain preventing from movement, a reason for postponing his exams. Yet on 5 June 1928 he addressed a letter to the University asking authorization to pass his exams in that semester as he was in a rush to return home. And in a letter to the dean finally, he excused himself for not attending the graduation on 19th December 1928 because of an »urgent trip«, the nature of which is not given. (This may have been related to his secret political activities.)

During his years in Berlin he wrote a number of articles in the Persian journals published in Germany, two of which are noteworthy regarding Azerbaijan as an integral and historical part of Iran, and the significance of the Persian language. The importance of these two articles is such that pro-Soviet historiography of Iran systematically suppressed them by ignoring them completely, although Arani mentioned them in his defense during the trial in 1938.

In the first article published in 1924, Arani deals with the question of Azerbaijan as a »vital and critical issue« for Iran. He refers to Azerbaijan as the »symbol« of the fire that illuminates the thought and spirit of the Iranian, as the »most important cradle of Iranian civilization, that »unfortunately, after the invasion of the blood-thirsty Mongols ... has forgotten its own language«. In these articles, Arani attacks those who, out of ignorance, think that Iranian Azeris are of the same race as the Turks. He attacks a certain Roshani Beg of Turkey for spreading such ideas. Arani states that if the Turks were capable of creating such architectural monuments as the Soltaniyeh Mosque near Zanzan and the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, why did they not create such fine pieces in their own country, i. e. Mongolia. He attributes the change of language in Azerbaijan to the rule of Hulaku Khan in Tabriz (d. 1265).¹⁷ In the second article on the significance of the Persian language and its development¹⁸ he regrets that the sphere of influence of this language in some of the neighbouring lands, particularly the Caucasus, where such great Persian poets as Khaqani and Nezami Ganjavi had been born and lived, was now reduced, namely because of Russian domination – a position that must have displeased the Soviets.

As a student, Arani was active in, and for some time headed, the Union of Iranian Students in Berlin, which organized a campaign against the expulsion of Ahmad Assadov in 1928, the leading Iranian communist student Arani had met

¹⁷ »Azerbaijan ya yek mas'ale-ye hayati va mamati-ye Iran«, [Azerbaijan as a Vital Problem of Iran] Farhangestan, no. 5, September 1924, pp. 247–54.

¹⁸ T. Arani, »Tadqiqat-e Lesani, Zaban Farsi«, Iranshahr, nos. 5–6, 15 February 1924, pp. 355–65.

in 1923.¹⁹ A hard-working, serious student, and always the best in his class, Arani was described by Iranian Students' Superintendent in Berlin, Mohammed-'Ali Jamalzadeh,²⁰ as »narcissistic and arrogant«, as »someone who considered his own thought and opinion above everyone else's – a fact which was not too far from the truth.« Arani was an honest and strong-willed young man, »not devoid of self-adulation.«²¹ He partly benefited from scholarships offered by the Iranian government to most students in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.²² Admittedly, he earned a good part of his living in Europe by working in the Kaveh printing house in Berlin, in spite of his weak eyesight.²³

In Berlin he was influenced by Morteza Alavi, who turned communist in the mid 1920s and created, along with Arani and some others, the RRPP. There is no evidence to confirm the Tudeh leaders' claim that Arani had established contact with the »center of the ICP in exile, making arrangements for party work in Iran.«²⁴ In fact, he stressed before the political police that the ICP leaders who contacted him after his return (presumably through M. Alavi) cut off relations shortly before they left Iran.²⁵

Arani must have returned to Iran in early 1930, that is one year after receiving his doctorate. In a letter, dated 29 November 1929, by the Iranian diplomat in Berlin, 'Azodi, to Dr. Grobba at the German Foreign Ministry concerning the expulsion of Ahmad Assadov, which had not been put into effect yet, there is question of pressuring the German government to expel T. Arani as well as another communist student named Rokni. 'Azodi tells the German Foreign Ministry official that it was »unbearable«, both for the Legation and the shah's personal

¹⁹ See Chaqueri, *Historical Documents* (footnote 1), vol. 6, pp. 130–32.

²⁰ Son of a the martyred Constitutionalist Seyyed Jamal Va'ez and a modern novelist, Jamalzadeh (d. 1997) had collaborated, along with former Constitutionalist Hasan Taqizadeh, with the German Reich during World War I. He continued to work for the Pahlavi regime until 1979 as its representative in the International Labour Organization. After the revolution he made statements in favour of the new regime and praised Khomeini.

²¹ Quoted in Golbon and Sharifi, *Mohakemeh-ye Mohakemehgaran* (footnote 16), pp. 201–05; this is confirmed by Arani himself during his defense in the 1938 tribunal; see Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 284. After his condemnation by the court in 1938 he was obliged to refund the government for the sums he had received.

²² Most Iranian students who benefited from such scholarships before or right after the Great War were from upper echelons of society, particularly the notables. See M. Delfani, »Mohas-selan-e irani dar oroupa dar toul-e jang-e jahani-ye avval«, *Ganjineh* 3/2-3, pp. 14–51.

²³ See Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 284; Golbon and Sharifi, *Mohakemeh-ye Mohakemehgaran* (footnote 16), pp. 201–05. For a list of his publications, see *ibid.* While Agahi (»Dokotr Arani ...« *Donya*, no. 5, 1979, p. 151) confirms that Arani worked for his livelihood in Germany, Kambakhsh in his Secret Report states that Arani benefited from a government scholarship.

²⁴ *Donya*, no. 3, Fall 1963, p. 42; *ibid.* no. 5, 1979, p. 153.

²⁵ »Interrogation of Dr. Arani«, printed in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 238.

envoy Farajallah Bahrami who had been sent to deal with the student unrest in Germany, that a small number of students be allowed to create so much trouble. »For this reason, Dr. Arani had already been informed [by the Legation] to leave for Persia as soon as possible.« The Legation expressed the hope that the German Foreign Ministry attended to the »urgent desire« of »expelling the aforementioned individuals [Assadov, Arani, and Rokni].«²⁶ Apparently, Arani complied in order to avoid a confrontation or a formal expulsion order.

Once back in Iran, he began his career both as a teacher and a government employee at the ministries of Industry and War. Given the close comradeship and continued contact between Arani and Alavi²⁷ and the large number of informed articles on Iran's internal situation in the journal *Paykar*²⁸ which Alavi published in Berlin, it would not be wrong to assume that Arani continued his collaboration with Alavi from Tehran, particularly because Arani confirms that he maintained contact with M. Alavi in Berlin and that the latter used to send him some issues of the weekly *Rundschau*, published by the Comintern after the advent of Nazi government in Germany in February 1933.²⁹

Arani had known about the existence of the ICP in Iran, no doubt through M. Alavi, who was a member of the KPD and who worked with Sultanzade of the ICP. Arani met the ICP leader 'A. Hesabi on several occasions before the latter left for the USSR in 1931 or 1932, with whom, according to his own account during the interrogation by the police, he discussed theoretical issues, no doubt, also political questions.³⁰

During this time he also met another the ICP leader Ladbon, whose work *The General Causes of the World Economic Crisis* he had been given to read by Hesabi, of which Arani did think much.³¹ The latter had lent him, in addition to *Paykar*, a few issues of *Setareh-ye sorkh*, which he claims he did not have time to read!³² After his contact with the last two communist leaders was cut off,³³ he

²⁶ Letter from Légation Impériale de Perse, dated 29 November 1929, in: Bundesarchiv, Reichskanzlei, Akten betreffend Kontrolle lästiger Ausländer, Bd. 1, R431/594; pp. 273–74.

²⁷ »Interrogation of Dr. Arani«, in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 231. In fact; Alavi had sent him, in 1932 through their mutual friend, Dr. Morteza Yazdi, a secret code for correspondence. Ibid., p. 396.

²⁸ In his police interrogations he admits having seen copies of this journal, which Ladbon Esfandiari brought him, but denies having read them – an understandable denial due to the self-protection instinct of a prisoner under threat. See Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 238.

²⁹ »Interrogation of Dr Arani«, printed in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 237.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 231, 237–38.

³¹ »Interrogation of Dr. Arani«, printed in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 247.

³² Ibid., p. 238.

³³ It is meaningful that no report of discussions between Arani and the two communist leaders were found in the ICP archives kept in the Comintern archives; see the report on Arani by Kamran Aslani. RTsKhIDNI, 495/217/201.

continued his Marxist studies and published some of his writings such as *The Theories of Knowledge, Physics, Chemistry, and Psychology*.³⁴

Some four years after his return to Persia, and after *Paykar* was definitely suppressed by the German authorities and also the Comintern, Arani founded along with two colleagues the monthly review *Donya*. The publication of *Donya* had nothing to do with the Comintern and the so-called »revived« ICP. In fact, nearly a year after the publication of *Donya* Arani was contacted by a Comintern agent called Kamran Aslani, a contact that had serious consequences for Arani personally and the fate of the left in Iran for decades to come. A little more than two years thereafter, on 10 May 1937, when some eighteen months after Arani had suspended the publication of *Donya*, he was arrested and interrogated on several occasions under duress. His trial and that of others in the Group lasted from 11 to 22 November 1938. On the basis of the 1931 Anti-Socialist Law, Arani received the harshest sentence, ten years of imprisonment. Arani died on 3 February 1940 in prison as a result of tortures and hardships he had suffered in the dungeon before and after the trial. The immediate cause of his death is variedly reported. According to the indictment against Reza Shah's police chief Mokhtari, prison superintendent Col. H. Niroumand, and prison physician Ahmadi, who were brought to trial on the morrow of the shah's abdication in 1941, Arani died after serious illness in prison, caused by subhuman conditions to which he had been subjected. Prison witnesses, among whom some prison guards, testified that every effort had been made to ensure that Arani would not receive medical treatment and that he would die in prison.³⁵ Arani knew that his days in prison had been numbered. In a letter to his closest colleagues before his death, I. Eskandari and B. Alavi, he wrote: »They will release you, but they will kill me [here in prison].«³⁶

According to one physician who made a post-mortem examination, Arani's physical conditions had changed so much in consequence of his illness, intentionally not attended to, that he could hardly be identified, even by his mother. Arani's death in prison is generally attributed to typhus, which afflicted him in consequence of jailing in a cell where other prisoners had died from that disease. Dr. A. Emami, who had examined Arani's corpse, testified during the two trials³⁷

³⁴ »Interrogation of Dr. Arani«, printed in: Parvande-ye Panjâh o Sehnafar (footnote 7), p. 238.

³⁵ For the actual text of the indictment, see C. Chaqueri, Historical Documents (footnote 1), vol. 15; Golbon and Sharifi, Mohakemeh-ye Mohakemehgaran (footnote 16), pp. 214–32.

³⁶ Published in the Tudeh Party Organ Rahbar, 10 Mehr 1325/1 October 1946; Chaqueri, Historical Documents (footnote 1), vol. 15, p. 5.

³⁷ The court was composed of judges named Khatounabadi and Zarreh, presided by Hussein-Qoli Vahid. The prosecutor was Dr. 'Amid. The defense lawyers were: S. Hashem Vakil, Dr. Aqayan, Arsalan Khal'atbari, the historiographer Ahmad Kasravi, 'Amidi-Nouri, Manshour, Nonahal, Qavam al-Din Majidi, and Kamkar. See H. Morselvand, Zendeginameh-ye Rejal va Mashahir-e Iran, Tehran, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 118–19.

of the police and prison officials in 1942 and 1944³⁸ that Arani had died either from poisoning or typhus, in addition to having been subjected to malnutrition.³⁹ In spite of the attempts made to clear Reza Shah of any responsibility in these crimes, it was stated during the trial in 1944 that instruction for arrests or keeping prisoners in jail even after the termination of their sentences had always come from the private secretariat of the shah⁴⁰ – a fact that was contested by the prosecutor. (Mokhtari himself always pretended that the arrests had been based on oral orders by Reza Shah himself.)⁴¹

To understand why Arani and his Circle fell victim to this »fate«, we should examine the content of the review *Donya* and the contacts that the Comintern and Soviet agents established with him.

³⁸ They were Rokn al-Din Mokhtari, Ahmad Ahmadi, and H. Niroumand, tried after the abdication of Reza Shah for complicity in the death of a number of political prisoners, including Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari and Farrokhi, but not Arani. The court found Arani's death to have been »due to cumulative effect of sustained ill treatment rather than to a single act of killing, and for this reason the judges may have found it difficult to establish a clear charge against any individual« Mokhtari and Niroumand were sentenced at their second trial to ten years with hard labor; Ahmadi to death; and Mustafa Rasekh to nine years with hard labor. See dispatch from Tehran to London, dated 6 April 1944, Foreign Office (FO) 371/40224.

³⁹ According to Golbon, Arani was moved to prison hospital on 4 Bahman 1318 (24 January 1940), and died ten days later. Abdolkarim Baluch, who was hospitalized in the same room with Arani and suffered from typhus, said that he was cared for but in the case of Arani deliberate negligence was applied. Arani was moved to the hospital after some seven or eight days of pleading by his sister and mother. Dr. Hashemi of the prison hospital stated that he was given instructions not to provide Arani with the necessary medication. Arani's body had been so disfigured that his mother could hardly recognize him. Prison guards testified at the trial of former prison officers that Arani was subjected to regular slashing that would render him unconscious – a fact that Niroumand recognized during his trial too. Prison chief Niroumand had issued instructions that food and medication brought from outside prison should not be delivered to him. The coroner's report testified that Arani had died of typhus. What was more, according to the prisoner A. Baluch, Arani's hands and feet had been chained in prison. Golbon and Sharifi, *Mohakemeh-ye Mohakemehgaran* (footnote 16), pp. 222–224, 227–228, 230, 232. All these are confirmed by the *Political Memoirs of Maleki, Khaterat-e siasi*, Paris, 1981, p. 276.

⁴⁰ See dispatch from Tehran to London, dated 6 April 1944, FO 371/40224.

⁴¹ See, for instance, the cases of photographer Mrs. Lilian; Anankikov and a number of Russian émigrés in Iran; Dinah Mora, who had entered Iran illegally and accused five individuals as Russian spies (who were arrested by Mokhtari but acquitted, while Morad himself was sent into internal exile without a court judgment); 'Abbas Hesabi, arrested in 1931 and condemned to ten years, illegally sent into internal exile in 1940; and Communists Y. Eftekhari, A. Avanesian, R. Zanjani, and some ten others, who after having served their sentences were sent to internal exile in Bandar Abbas. For an example of Police Chief Mokhtari's independence from the government and Premier Foroughi and his direct contact with the dictatorial ruler, Reza Shah, see Ra'di Azarakhshi's account (»Khatereh-ye digari az molaqat ba Sarpas Mokhtari«, *Khandaniha*, no. 52, March 1973, pp. 23–26); the incident concerned Taqizadeh's article on the Persian language.

RRPP and its Program

In a letter dated 29 March 1926, addressed to the Comintern's Eastern Department, the CC of the RRPP announced the formation of the organization, sending along a *Memorandum* and a copy of its program, asking the Comintern in Moscow to receive one of its members for the purpose of discussing »permanent relations« between the two organizations and their collaboration in the »common revolutionary cause.« They added that the answer could be transmitted to them through the CC of the IAH in Berlin, i. e., »Comrades Münzenberg and Gibarti.«⁴² The two Iranians who signed the letter were no other than Taqi Arani (Erani),⁴³ as CC secretary, and Mahmoud Pour-Reza, as its chairman.⁴⁴ Thus, contrary to what Arani later had to tell police interrogators, several factors point to the communistic tendencies of the RRPP. First, the fact that, in addition to Alavi and Assadov who had admittedly been communists at this time, the leaders of the new organization had been sufficiently close to the German communist leader Münzenberg to enable them to establish contact with the Comintern through him.⁴⁵ Second, the very desire to establish relations with the Comintern testifies to their communist proclivities.⁴⁶ Third, the very content of their Memorandum and program sent to the Comintern (summarized below) establishes the commu-

⁴² Letter of the »Comité Central du Parti Républicain Révolutionnaire Persan« to the Ostabteilung der Kommunistischen Internationale, dated 29 March 1926, RTsKhIDNI, 495/90/133.

⁴³ He spelled his name as »Erani«; »Arani« seems to be more correct, however, since it is an adjectival form of Arân (or Arrân) the territory north of the Aras river and the land now called the Republic of Azerbaijan.

⁴⁴ Pour-Reza, who had been known to the Berlin police authorities as the treasurer of the Iranian Students Union in Berlin, signed both the letter and the accompanying Memorandum addressed to the Comintern as Parliamentary Deputy. Pour-Reza was also later presented in the League's documents as a parliamentary deputy (see below). There is no evidence, however, to support the veracity of his claim, for there is no such name among the Majles deputies »elected« during Reza Shah's reign; see Zahra Shajî'i, *Namâyandegân-e Majles-e Showrâ-ye Melli dar Bistoyek Dowreh-ye Qanoungozâri*, Tehran, 1965. In the documents of the Liga he was also identified as the representative of Iran's Socialist Party; for more on this, see below.

⁴⁵ A note by Louis Gibarti (Laszlo Dobos, 1895–1967) to the Eastern Department of the Comintern, dated 9 April 1926, informs the latter of the formation of the RRPP in Berlin and its relations with the Liga gegen Kolonialgreuel und Unterdrückung, RTsKhIDNI/495/90/133.

⁴⁶ In a letter dated 18 June 1926 (RTsKhIDNI/495/90/133) to the German left-wing socialist leader Georg Ledebour, inviting him to one of their meetings, the RRPP leaders noted that they had previously underlined their »common cooperation with the European proletariat and revolutionary and national-liberation and elements of the Eastern peoples.« The letter was signed by the chairman, M. Pour-Reza, and the CC secretary, Ahmad Farhâd. The latter became Chancellor of Tehran University in the late 1950s, which post he resigned in January 1963 in protest against the invasion of the campus by the shah's paratroopers to quell the student movement.

nist, and even Bolshevik, tendency of its leaders. In the *Memorandum*, addressed to the Eastern Department of the Comintern,⁴⁷ the RRPP leaders made several points, which underlined their political proclivities very clearly:

1) Iran is going through another »frightening and tragic« phase in her history of 'terror and oppression'; pauperism, misery, and hunger are the inevitable results of the regime headed by a »military gang«; political rights and the Constitution of the land are but »toys in the hands of the present-day master« of Persia whose »best adviser« is British imperialism.

2) the people of Persia repeatedly manifested their determination in the struggle for liberation through the »uninterrupted waves of uprisings in Tabriz, Gilan, Khorasan, Mazandaran as well as central and south Persia« ; the twenty-year old history of Persia's »pseudo-constitution« reflected »the history of twenty years of ceaseless uprisings.«

3) the history of Persia also showed that the revolution could succeed and attain its objectives when the oppressed masses of the people could be »homogeneously and solidly organized by their conscious, revolutionary elements« and be led by an »ideologically homogeneous, revolutionary party« ; the very lack of such a viewpoint since the time of the 1906 Revolution had led to the defeat of all the uprisings.

4) the »Great Russian« revolution had provided Persian revolutionaries with the »lessons and example« of whose correctness they were »unshakably convinced« they had »complete sympathy and love« for the Russian revolution and recognized its »world-historical significance«; they were equally »aware« of the »historical role of the Russian revolution in the liberation struggle of the Eastern peoples, particularly in Persia's revolutionary movement; they believed that the victory of the Persian people's national struggle »could be assured only in union with world proletariat and the first proletarian state of the world.«⁴⁸

Finally, the RRPP's CC »unanimously« appealed to »all the revolutionary sections of the Communist International, particularly the CC of the Russian Communist Party« to lend their support to its struggle.⁴⁹

The program of the RRPP, sent along with the letter and the *Memorandum* to the Comintern, does not appear to have provoked any positive reaction on the part of the latter; if it did, no record of it seems to have been preserved by either side. The content of the program, which can be characterized as national, left-democratic, and inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, is summarized below:

⁴⁷ Dated 29 March 1926, RT'sKhIDNI/495/90/133. This document was also signed jointly by T. Erani and Mahmoud Pour-Reza.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; the Comintern was told that the Memorandum had been unanimously adopted at the CC meeting held on 23 March 1926.

1) establishment of a democratic, centralized republic wherein »feudal rule« would be abolished; the power of the new state emanates from a parliament elected on the basis of generally recognized democratic rules.

2) reorganization of the provincial administration, leading to the creation of elected communes and municipalities under the guidance of the central government;

3) in addition to the abolition of the capitulary rights held by foreign powers, the new legal administration would be freed from any intervention on the part of the clergy;

4) Properties of the ruling house would be nationalized; traitors would be tried and their properties expropriated;

5) in addition to specifying the need for sending students from the working-class families abroad, the schooling and educational program would stress the general policies put forth at the time by most socialist tendencies in the West;

6) in the domain of the national economy, the program would deploy and stimulate the productive forces of the country for the creation of productive investments; engage foreign capital under state control; establish a series of state enterprises in different branches of the industry; abolish private monopolies; revise all foreign-held concessions; create a national bank to regulate the national economy and the credit system;

7) reduction of indirect taxes, on the one hand, and the increase of direct taxes, on the other; abatement of taxes on the peasantry;

8) adoption of customs and tariff policies, which would support the development of home industries;

9) in the social domain, the program envisaged disarming and settlement of nomadic tribes, re-educating (civilizing) them through state assistance; introducing civil, commercial, and judiciary codes on the basis of European models in order to improve the personal and social lives of citizens; abolishing customs and usages harmful to the people's health and with adverse effect on the economy and civilized life; establishing cultural institutions such as theaters, cinemas, museums, and music and other art schools;

10) inducing the population to save through the creation of saving institutions; increasing the population; particular care would be taken for the improvement of the condition of women, including the recognition of their right to divorce and the abolition of the obligation to veil themselves; the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of their religious beliefs; reforming the Persian language through its development and improvement;

11) prohibiting the consumption of opium, hashish, and other narcotics as well as the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages; the creation of a vast national health service both for physical and mental illnesses;

12) creating consumer cooperatives; the prohibition of child labor; recognizing the right to strike, an eight-hour work day, and other measures associated with

progressive social legislation in Europe at the time such as social insurance, minimum wage, etc.;

13) canceling peasants' debts; the creation of agricultural banks to assist the peasantry; the purchase of agricultural lands for distribution among the peasants; modernization of agricultural production;

14) recognition of religion as a private affair of citizens; the separation of spiritual and state powers (of church and state); nationalization of all religious endowments for the purpose of general welfare of the people and school construction; submission of mosques as well as the education, graduation, and licensing of the clergy to the state.⁵⁰

Publicly, the RRPP sent a brochure titled *La Perse sous le Signe de la Révolution*, to «all the newspapers and political parties of the world», the RRPP, thus informing the Western world of the plight of the Iranian people under dictatorship and the need to transform the state and society.⁵¹ RRPP's publication in French, distributed apparently only in Europe, presented once again a succinct analysis of imperialist penetration of Iran, including the points quoted below from the Persian text with regard to the Russian tsarism and British colonialism, stressing the historical weakness of the Iranian bourgeoisie, and consequently the continued predominance of the feudal aristocracy.⁵² Without any reference or allusion to its contact with the Comintern or the German PC, the RRPP severely denounced the Pahlavi king and his regime and made the following demands:

In the struggle against the enemy, [the people of Persia] have at their disposal a very powerful instrument, that is, its vanguard the revolutionary party. Armed with it, the people will courageously engage in the struggle, which they will continue till victory. We, who consider ourselves to be at the service and the combatants of the liberation of the people and of the revolution, feel duty-bound to raise the banner of liberty in the forefront [of the liberation struggle]. We launch our appeal, making its echo reverberate across all Persia, to its remotest corner of the land. We struggle for the holy cause of the liberation of the Persian people from the yoke of foreign domination; we struggle with it [the people] for the annihilation of the domination of feudal aristocracy and its representative, Reza Shah. Our struggle is for a life worthy of the name and for the working and dispossessed Persia. Our struggle is for political equality of all Persian [i. e., Iranian] citizens. Our struggle is for a free, democratic republic.⁵³

Although conceptually resembling the Kuomintang in China, RRPP's prime objective was to struggle against the «Iranian Tchiang Kai Tchek», i. e., Reza

⁵⁰ RRPP's «Program»; in RTsKhIDNI, 495/90/133.

⁵¹ Reprinted in *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran*, ed. C. Chaqueri, Florence, 1980, pp. 561–67.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 561–65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 566–67.

Khan. The insistence on Reza Khan, now the shah in Persia, was import, for Iranian communists had already tasted the fruit of the policy of »collaboration« with the leader of the »national bourgeoisie« recommended by the Comintern.⁵⁴ Now, therefore, the RRPP could not but set itself the goal of combating Iran's Tchiang Kai Tchek.

Conclusion

The creation of the RRPP either directly or indirectly as a surrogate of the ICP reflected a political moment in Iranian society, which was seized, on the one hand, in the tumults of a serious political change – namely, the establishment of a new dynasty and a centralized dictatorship under Reza Khan Pahlavi –, and on the other, by increasing attention radical elements were paying to the need to bring about a socioeconomic transformation of their country and Iran's politico-economic independence necessary for any self-sustained, global development. As it happened, the RRPP came into being at a time when the fortunes of the ICP were at their nadir, particularly after the party had failed to provide leadership, or at least some guidance, during the triple uprisings of Khorasan, Gilan, and Azerbaijan in 1926. It must have been the very absence of political leadership on the scene that led some of ICP members or sympathizers to create the RRPP. Indeed, the need for an organization, or any organization at all, had been so strongly felt that one of the veteran leaders of the Jangali movement, Ehsân-Allah Khan, dared, for the first time in his exile, to persuade the Soviets to provide him with some assistance to launch a revolutionary movement in Iran.⁵⁵ It was this very social »fever« that made the ground fertile for the RRPP, and later the ICP, and later its unofficial journal *Paykar* published in between 1931 and 1933.

There can be little doubt that *Paykar*, as one of the factors on Iran's political chessboard, was a successful enterprise in so far as it caught the attention and nourished the imagination of many readers, both inside and outside the country. True, it had an agitational style – which naturally added to its effectiveness –, but its success was mostly due to the appeal of the issues it raised. It touched the right cord in a society, particularly among its educated youth, that was craving for new things Western, including a share in political life. True again, this youth had been most influenced by the idealized image – indeed, mirage – of Soviet society held to be a more advanced model of Germany and France, where they were being educated. None of them knew the bitter realities of the Soviet life. (Only Alavi among them had the misfortune of discovering, after his deportation from

⁵⁴ See Chaqueri, *Victims of Faith* (footnote 6).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the democratic Germany, the bitter truth for himself!) What matters historically, however, is that these young men reflected, and also represented, the profound need and the dormant desire felt by vast Iranian popular masses who wanted change in every domain – economic, political, and cultural – but who were opposed to brutalizing their broad cultural heritage by a ruthless, centralizing dictatorship which, in addition to enriching only a privileged few, contented itself with the facade of Westernization and which, above all, discounted the indispensability of democratic institutions and practice as well as of cultural development in the course of economic change. This is the point they made in the secret Manifesto they sent to the Comintern.

On the other hand, the brutal reaction of the other three factors – the Pahlavi regime, the Western powers, and the USSR – reflected not only the hypersensitivity to immediate gains, but also their total ignorance and lack of consciousness of what history was to have in store for them all. The ruthless, nay, totalitarian methods with which the Pahlavi treated these idealist students did not solely reflect the great desire of the new political clique in Iran, which was rapidly and pitilessly enriching itself, to hang on to power; it also exhibited, as one American Embassy report from Tehran »fatefully« stated it, the »fear«⁵⁶ of a deep-seated resentment on the part of the people of Iran, particularly the more enlightened ones among them, toward the Pahlavi dynasty (and eventually the West), which, if not checked and brutally suppressed in good time, would eradicate the new regime and their foreign supporters.

The case of the Soviet Union, which posed as the »big brother« of the oppressed nations and world proletariat, was, naturally, even less »complicated« but perhaps more tragic. This Soviet government was aware of two important factors in Iran, which it could use to its own benefit. First, the »moral capital« Soviet Russia enjoyed with the radical elements (including the RRPP), and even some liberals, in Iranian society. Second, the historical »impasse«, in which such elements had been caught; on the one hand, they were being mercilessly repressed inside their country by the military dictatorship; on the other, Western democracies were neither willing nor capable of understanding the need for supporting democratic movements in Iran, because such an undertaking would have endangered their immediate interests in that country and even beyond.

Ironically, RRPP and Arani were victims of both Stalinism and Western support of a brutal, military dictatorship, through the suppression of history by the former, leading the post-1941 generation of Iranians to doubt the veracity of Western claims to democratism, or at least the universality attached to it.

The tragic disappearance of the RRPP and its independent-minded leaders

⁵⁶ Confidential letter by the US Envoy in Tehran Charles Hart to Department of State, Washington, D. C., dated 1 June 1931, USNA 891.00B/54, p. 2.

such as Alavi and Arani who were sacrificed as unwilling pawns to the multi-faceted, checkered altar of »higher interests«, could not but lead dramatic ends.

True, such radical elements did shed only a ray of hope in Reza Shah's Irano-Nox, lasting long enough to give even the next generation the lead to pick up the standard of the struggle for democracy and socioeconomic development in their country. However, because their tragedy was also *historically* multi-faceted and compounded, they could not transmit to the next generation their accumulated experiences concerning the struggle against the dictatorship at home, their disappointment with the double-standard in the West, still less their disillusionment with both the Soviet development model and the hypocritical Soviet *raison d'Etat*. To pass on merely the *banner of ideals* would have been insufficient; necessary would have been to transmit their experiences as *high-flying standards* which could not have been seized upon by, and even defy, the mighty Soviet state. Their tragedy was their lack of a higher, i. e., historical, consciousness in their newly acquired political awareness which prompted them to act with courage and fortitude.