IJEP International Journal of Economics and Politics

DOI:10.29252/jep.2.1.63

The Revolution for Law: A Chronographic Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Date of submission: 23-10-2020
Date of acceptance: 11-12-2020

JEL Classification:
K10
K12
K15

Keywords:
Constitutional Revolution
Revolution for Law
Iran

ABSTRACT

This paper brings together a description and analysis of various aspects of the constitutional revolution, as a revolt by society in favour of the law and against arbitrary rule by the state, rather than by the lower against the upper classes as in European revolutions, this being characteristic of major Iranian revolts both before and after that event. It includes a discussion of aspects which have generally been neglected, notably the 'politics of elimination' pursued by both Mohammad Ali Shah and the radicals of the revolution, how neither side would relent until it was too late, and how the revolutionaries rejected the shah's offer of reconciliation, to their later regret when they became disillusioned by the results, much like many participants of the revolution of February 1979, 70 years later.

1. Introduction

In 1906 a constitution laid down the rules and procedures for government based in law. It was the first time in Iranian history that government was 'conditioned' (*mashrut*) to a set of fundamental laws which defined the limits of executive power, and detailed the rights and obligations of the state and society. No such revolution had ever happened in Europe, because - as a rule - there had always been legal limits to the exercise of power in European societies, however powerful the government might be, and however narrow, limited and unequal the scope of the law in defining the relationship between the state and society, and among the social classes. In Europe, the law had often been unequal, and unfair to the majority of the people. But, even in the four centuries of absolutism or despotism which reigned over the continent

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from England to Russia - although absolutism survived for so long only in Russia - there had been limits to exercise of state power, but they were considerably less in Russia than in the West. Revolts and revolutions in Europe had never been fought for law as such, but for changing the existing law to increase its scope of application, or to make it fairer[1].

2. Constitutional Revolution

2.1. The discovery of law

The constitutional movement began slowly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the defeats of Iran by Russia, and greater contact with Russia and other European powers, especially Britain, had opened a completely new window to the Iranian elite. Defeating and being defeated, even ruled, by foreigners had been quite familiar occurrences in the country's history. So had the imposition or importation, since ancient times, of foreign traditions, habits, religions, products and commodities. The puzzle of the Qajar rulers, and the soul-searching of the enlightened elite who served them - be it Abbas Mirza, the Prince Regent in the 1820s, or Amir Nezam Farahani (Amir Kabir) in the late 40's, or Mirza Hoseyn Khan Moshir al-Dowleh (Sephsalar) and his men in the 60's - was not just about defeat in war and failure in peace. It was about the possession, by their new adversaries and competitors, of techniques and institutions which had never been known before, and which gave them such superiority over the Iranians that it looked as if no amount of traditional power and technology might equal. It almost looked like magic, if not to the elite, certainly to large numbers of people in towns and cities[2]. The tales that were spread about Europe, European cities, European science and technology, European armies, European wealth, European liberties and, not least sexual habits, were mostly fantasy or at least highly exaggerated. As late as the 1880's, outside of a small elite, almost all those who had heard of Malkam Khan, knew him as a magician, who, in one anecdote had brought dead sparrows back to life, and in another, had taken his right leg off and then put it back in its place. It was virtually believed that

1. See Katouzian (1997)
2. See Katouzian (2010)

European countries were run as if by a magic wand[1]. As late as 1911, and despite having spent two years in Beirut and one in Lausanne, Seyyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh had still been puzzled to find out that the streets of Paris were not paved with crystal when he first visited the French capital[2].

The early modernisers had focussed their attention on the acquisition of modern techniques and military organisation. They sent a few state students to Europe, and later founded the Dar al-Fonun or *Politechnique*. The concern with the technological gap reached its height, perhaps, when Mostashar al-Dawleh declared that construction of railways would be the key to Iranian development. But later he came to the belief that Law – i.e. the abolition of arbitrary rule - was the most necessary requirement.

The importance of law had been emphasised both in Malkam Khan's writings and in Sephsalar's constitutional framework. It did not take long for the campaign for law and modernisation - which, as noted, were believed to be directly connected together - to take a definitely rebellious form. Malkam Khan began to publish the newspaper *Qanun* in London against the shah and for constitutional government, which was smuggled into Iran and was potent in spreading the idea among a larger elite.

In the constitutional framework which Malkam had outlined for reform from above it was abundantly clear that the most fundamental issue was the establishment of government based in law in place of arbitrary rule[3]. But it was from the mid-1870's perhaps that the reformers' thoughts definitely turned to the necessity of Law - of *Qanun* - as the pillar for the reform of government, and the panacea for modernisation, or - as they described it at the time - 'civilisation'. The matter, of course, had been implicit in the central idea of ministerial and collective cabinet responsibility, which was the kernel of Sepahsalar's reform. Nevertheless, the idea of 'the rule of law' clearly looked a good deal more radical than mere ministerial responsibility.

The word *qanun* (from its Greek root, cf. canon) had existed in Iran but been used virtually exclusively in connection to medicine as well as

1 . See Tavakkoli-Targhi (2001)
2 . Conversations with Jamalzadeh, Geneva, June 1977
3 . See Malkam Khan, (1948)

philosophy. Indeed the word *al-Qanun* is the very title of Avicenna's classic treatise on medicine. Shari'a was known in Iran more specifically as *Shar'* and its rules were known as *Ahkam*. They were made up of an extensive and complex body of civil as well as criminal codes, but – and this is the crucial point - they did not provide a formal check on the power and authority of the state.

The pre-Islamic myth of *farr-e Izadi* or God's Grace would still justify and legitimise arbitrary rule, alongside the well-known Islamic command "O' ye Faithful, obey God, the Prophet *and those in authority among you*[1]." For the Shi'a ulama, of course, 'those in authority' were the holy Imams only, not the caliphate or sultanate, but – as is well known – in practice they normally tolerated the existing reality, namely the arbitrary state. The state on the other hand, did not observe Shari'a rules when they did not suit its purpose, most notably in taking people's lives and property: the Shari'a rules were helpless when, for example, Shah Abbas I decided to kill his son, and Fath'ali Shah, to kill his vizier. It was precisely this time-immemorial tradition of arbitrary rule that, eventually, the nineteenth century modernisers saw as the *differentia specifica* between Iranian and European governments and as the obstacle par excellence to legal, political, cultural and economic modernisation.

Naser al-Din Shah was well aware of the importance, perhaps necessity, of reform. No longer did he think as had his grandfather Fath'ali Shah that loss of arbitrary power would necessarily result in chaos, which had always been the case in Iranian history. He himself had seen Europe and its orderly and efficient government and society three times. Indeed, upon returning from his third visit to European countries, he declared: 'All the order and progress...in Europe...is due to the existence of law. Therefore, we too have made up our mind to introduce a law and act according to it.' He went further and charged a high council of the notables to sit and make laws for the land. But it came to hardly anything at all[2].

After he was sacked as Iranian minister in London, Malkam stayed in London and in 1890 began to publish his highly effective newspaper *Qanun*

1. Ya ayyuh'al-lazina, Aminu, atia'Allah wa ati'al-Rasul, *wa ulu'l amr minkum*. (emphasis added)
2 . Nava'I (1982)

or Law, while his disciple Mostashar al-Dowleh wrote a book entitled One Word (*Yek Kalameh*), the one word which would solve all of the country's main ills was thus dramatically revealed to be LAW. It is worth noting that, despite so recent a homage paid to law by the shah himself, the word was seen as being so subversive that upon discovering that he was the author of *Yek Kalameh* , Mostashar al-Dowleh was put in chains, his home was looted, his property confiscated, and his pension stopped[1].

2.2. The Emergence of politics

The absence of law perforce meant the absence of politics, since it is only within a long-term legal framework where rights and obligations are defined that independent thoughts and actions become possible. Up to the 1900s, the word *siyasat* had two inter-related meanings. First, it meant the art of governing the realm successfully as in the title of Nezam al-Molk's *Siyasatnameh*; the alternative title, *Siyar al-Muluk*, was significantly the title of Arabic translations, from the Pahlavi original, of *Shahnameh*. Secondly, and much more frequently in usage, it meant punishment, usually, execution of fallen state officials and dignitaries. Since politics did not exist, there was no appropriate term for it. Increasing contacts with Europe in the nineteenth century led the shah, state functionaries and intellectuals to use the terms *polteek* and *polteeki (*both of them corruptions of the French term *politique*) in reference to European political affairs. They even constructed the term *polteekchi* for European politicians.

The Revolt of 1890-92 over the concession of Iran's tobacco trade was the first political act, properly so-called, in Iranian history, and a prelude and dress rehearsal for the Constitutional Revolution[2].[i] This was a dress rehearsal for the Constitutional Revolution, just as the revolt of June 1963 was for the Revolution of 1979. Both these revolts had the sympathy of most of the people, and if they had persisted they would have spread to the whole of the

1. See Seyyed-Ghorab and McGlinn (2008). See for his long, reasoned as well as impassioned letter, Nazem al-Islam Kermani, in Ali Akbar Sa'idi Sirjani (ed.) (*Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iraniyan*, vol. 1, (Tehran: Agah, 1983) pp. 172177. See also, Abdollah Mostowfi, *Sharh-e Zendegani-ye Man* , vol. 1 (Tehran: Zavvar, 1981).

2 . See further, Nikki Keddie (1966), and See Katouzian (1998)

society, as in all such cases in Iranian history. The Tobacco Revolt did not go any further because the state backed down at various stages. The 1963 Revolt did not spread further because the state was strong enough to suppress it quickly with an iron fist, and before the less daring crowds could have been encouraged to join the movement.

The Tobacco Revolt was an almost unprecedented event in Iranian history. For the first time the public had revolted peacefully, and for a clear and well-defined purpose. For the first time also, the arbitrary state had given in to a public demand, rather than either suppressing it or being overthrown violently. *It was the nearest thing to the European practice of politics perhaps that had ever been experienced in Iranian history*. The Constitutional Revolution also started and succeeded peacefully at first, fifteen years later, although later developments led to violent confrontation, and civil war.

The death of Naser al-Din Shah was followed by increasing disorder and chaos both at the centre and in the provinces, just as it had always happened after the fall of an able and strong ruler. Mozaffar al-Din Mirza, his son and successor, was a well-meaning but feeble and weak man, easy to manipulate by his entourage, especially those close to him. He once said to some of them that the only things he valued in life were eating, hunting and copulation.

Chaos Approach

Revolutions normally occur when the state is weak, even though revolutionary ideas and agendas may have been advanced over a period of time. In Iranian history, at any rate, weakness of the state always ran the risk of rebellion. For even at seemingly peaceful times the state was normally unpopular and the society potentially rebellious[1]. The aim of traditional Iranian rebellions was to overthrow an 'unjust' ruler and replace him with a 'just' one, since otherwise arbitrary government was regarded as a natural, therefore both necessary and inevitable phenomenon[2]. This time, as noted, the window of Europe had offered the very attractive alternative of lawful and responsible government. It was such that Prince Zel al-Soltan, the shah's elder brother who was not at all noted for democratic sentiments, said, after visiting

1 . See, for example Katouzian (2003, 2004)
2. See further Katouzian (2007)

Paris, 'Although they say there is freedom and republic [in France], and there is absolute licence, this is not the case. In this country it looks as if everyone…has the book of law under his arm and in his mind, and knows that there is no escaping from the claws of the law[1].

This was the other side of the coin. Lawful government was not just the opposite of arbitrary rule, but the opposite of chaos as well. Chaos had always been seen as the natural alternative to arbitrary rule, just as absolute and arbitrary rule had been regarded as the only alternative to chaos. Arbitrary rule (*estebdad*) was identified with stability, and chaos - *fetneh, ashub, enqelabat*, etc. - with generalised lawlessness. Now it looked as if there was a magic wand - and it was seen as a magic wand, except by a very few most sophisticated intellectuals - that was certain to rid the country of its traditional habits, arbitrary rule and chaos at a stroke, which would inevitably lead to modernisation and progress.

The end of the 19th century was a moment of great weakness for the Qajar state. A strong ruler had died, a weak ruler had replaced him, most of the officials at the centre were - even more than usual – cynical and largely concerned with gaining or retaining power and lining up their own pockets; provincial governors, no longer being afraid of the stick of the centre, were behaving even more unjustly than before, and nomads, tribes and other clans were responding in like manner wherever they found an opportunity to so respond. In his diaries for the years 1897 to 1905, which have come to light in recent years, Malek al-Movarrekhin details the growing chaos both in the centre and in the provinces. There are loud complaints of governors-general confiscating private property and raping women, while at the same time nomadic people attacking and looting villages and taking their people into slavery.

Significantly, the contemporary historian's account contains reports of chaos in the centre as well as the provinces. To give but two examples of a long list of chaotic events, in August 1899, Aziz Mirza, a ruffian as well as Qajar nobleman, causes a great public mischief, and is brought before the

1 . Quoted in Bastani Parizi (1983)

governor of Tehran, who - perhaps not knowing he is a *shazdeh* (Qajar nobleman) - orders the soles of his feet to be beaten with a stick in his own presence. While being thus beaten, the culprit pulls out a revolver from his pocket and fires at the governor, but misses. The governor reports the incident to the shah and the latter orders them to cut off his hand. This causes unrest among the very large community of other *shazdeh*s. The shah sacks the governor and orders him to pay pecuniary compensation to the mutilated man. He also orders the expulsion from town of the officer who had arrested him. In April 1903, Ein al-Dowleh, Tehran's governor (who became chief minister later in the same year) receives a regular bribe of about a 1000 tomans a day from the bakers and butchers. Both bread and meat are short and expensive. Some women stop the shah's and the governor's carriages and complain. The governor orders them to be beaten up[1].

Such was the informal history. At the formal level, Atabak (Amin al-Soltan) took two large government loans from the Russians during the six years – 1897-1903 - that he ran the government after Amin al-Dowleh. The loans were partly used to finance the Shah's costly and wasteful tours in Europe. But they were also helpful to save the state from bankruptcy, although many people believed that they had been entirely squandered, and Atabak took much of the blame for it. He also took the blame for the rising resentment against the operations of the new team of Belgian officials who were employed to run Iran's customs[2]. There were campaigns against him especially in Tehran, Tabriz, and Isfahan[3].

Some important religious dignitaries began to support the merchants, and the great ulama in Najaf provided further encouragement. As noted, there was a campaign for the overthrow of Atabak in which a forged letter of his excommunication by Akhud Mullah Kazem Khorasani, Hajj Mirza Hoseyn (*najl-e*) Mirza Khalil Tehrani, etc., played an important role. The document turned out to be a forgery, although it is true that the ulama in question were opposed to Atabak. Another *fatva* from Najaf was also forged in Tabriz, which

1 . See for extensive reports *Yaddasht-ha-ye Malek al-Movarrekhin va Mer'at alVaqaye'-e Mozaffari (1989)*
2 . See Martin (1989)
3 . See further, Martin (2008)

led to the expulsion of the head of customs there, though, upon discovering the fabrication, Hajj Mirza Hasan Mojtahed who had been suspected of being involved was driven out of the city. The anti-Babi 'pogroms' or *Babi-koshi*s in Isfahan and Yazd, with 120 killed in Yazd alone, was in part aimed at Atabak, though they were other motives behind them as well[1]. Atabak fell in September 1903, and Majid Mirza Ein al-Dowleh replaced him within a couple of months.

There was a deadly 'competition' between Ein al-Dowleh and Amin al-Soltan. Even after the former replaced the latter and he went for a journey round the world, his party was still quite active against Ein al-Dowleh. Given the highly decentralised nature of the Shi'a institutions, vigorous competition and/or destructive conflict among the ulama was a familiar tradition. After the death of Mirza Hasan Ashtiyani, who had been the most prominent *mojtahed* in Tehran, followed by that of Seyyed Ali Akbar Tafreshi, both Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri and Seyyed Abdollah Behbahani wished to be recognised as the chief *mojtahed* in the city. Nuri, Seyyed Abolqasem Imam Jom'eh, and a few other important ulama tended to support Ein al-Dowleh. Behbahni's circle, which opposed him, included the Ashtiyanis and the Tabataba'is, except that Seyyed Mohammad Tabatab'i himself was other-worldly and did not have a personal stake in the conflict. Some of the conflict related even to who should have the control of one or two colleges – especially Madreseh-ye Marvi - in Tehran[2].

The personal rivalry between Nuri and Behbahani began to take shape along political lines, although Nuri acted in concert with other ulama at the crucial moments before the campaign for the constitution bore fruit. Ein al-Dowleh's first major friction with Behbahani was in fact in 1901 and as governor of Tehran, when Behbahani had intervened to save some college students (*talabeh*s) from being banished for a misdeed which they had committed against himself. But the governor had replied with contempt,

1 . See further Browne (1966); Jamalzadeh (1955); Katouzian (2000)

2. For a recently published contemporary account of such conflicts see Mohammad Ali Tehrani Katouzian (2000). This hitherto unpublished primary source which contains overa thousand pages and has been published from the original manuscript is an important new addition to the few primary sources which exit on the Constitutional Revolution. It surpasses many of them in relative objectivity, and contains details not found in other sources.

saying that the men had not been arrested for his sake so that they could be set free by his intervention.

3. Constitutionalism

Two international events which played important psychological roles in strengthening the cause of constitutionalism and emboldening its partisans in Iran have not received the emphasis they deserve. First, the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905. Iranian constitutionalists literally believed that 'Japan defeated Russia, because the former was a constitutionalist regime, the latter a despotic one'. The outbreak of the 1905 revolution in Russia - itself encouraged by that defeat and humiliation - was even more potent, both in providing a model from the dreaded big bear itself, and by spreading radical ideas and campaign methods - sometimes embodied in fighters arriving from the Caucasus - especially among the modern intellectuals, many of whom - e. g. Taqizadeh, Dowlat-Abadi, Mosavat - were still in religious attire. Young radicals - democrats and social democrats, particularly in Tehran, Tabriz, Gilan and Mashhad - began to form groups, and launch campaigns for radical revolutionary programmes[1].

As noted above, there were reports, from the four corners of the country, of tyrannical behaviour by governors-general. More recently, there had been reports of injustice to the people of Fars by the governor-general, Sho'a' al-Saltaneh - one of the shah's important sons - and by the governor-general of Kerman. Although in the latter case matters were a good deal more complicated, and sources of blame numerous, nevertheless, the news arriving from Tehran put the whole blame on the government. On the other hand, Sho'a' al-Saltaneh, who was the shah's second son and a favourite of Ein al-Dowleh for succession after his ailing father, had definitely been confiscating the people's property in Fars.

As is well known, the increase in the price of sugar triggered off the first explosion. The governor of Tehran, Mirza Ahmad Ala al-Dowleh, suspected

1.The influence of events in Russia may be seen clearly in the public statements put out by Iranian Social Democrats (*Ejtem'iyun-e Amiyun*), which vehemently supported the constitutional movement and, incidentally, were highly respectful of Tabatab'i. For the full text of the statements, see Nazem al-Islam Kermani (1996).

the sugar merchants of hoarding, and had the soles of the feet of a few of them - including an old and much respected Seyyed - heavily beaten. Next day the bazaar shut down, and large numbers of merchants, ulama and others joined a congregation in the central Royal Mosque to protest against the governor's arbitrary behaviour. A leading preacher and radical constitutionalist, Seyyed Jamal al-Din Isfahani attacked the government from the pulpit, Imam Jom'eh who was a friend of the chief minister denounced him, and his men broke up the meeting. It ended in confusion, fear and flight[1].

The event led to the departure of many ulama, students, merchants and shopkeepers, etc., to the shrine of Hazrat-e Abdol'azim in a traditional demonstration of great anger against the government. The 'migration' happened in December 1905, and was led by Behbahani, Tabataba'i and a few other important ulama, whom Nuri joined a couple of days later. The *bast* (sanctuary or sit-in strikes) was financed from various sources, especially merchants and traders, but also some important enemies of Ein al-Dowleh who otherwise cared little for lawful government. It should be emphasised that these included Mohammad Ali Mirza, the heir designate, and his unbalanced and pitiless brother Salar al-Dowleh, sons of the shah who were to fight against constitutionalism for as long as they could. This demonstrates in a particularly clear and unambiguous way the discordant and intrigue-ridden nature of the arbitrary society, where - seen from the angle of the European tradition - some of the biggest pillars of the establishment were conjoining with those that wished to bring it down. Louis Phillippe Joseph Duc d' Orléans ('Phillippe Égalitée') had played a similar role in the French revolution, but - rather like Zel al-Soltan in this case - he had been a pretender to the throne, not heir to it. And further than that, although a few enlightened members of the aristocracy (e.g. Marquis de Condorcet, not to mention Lafayette) supported the French revolution in its earlier stages, there was no onrush of the nobility, high or low, to abandon ship in the way that Orléan had done to almost all of his peers' disgust and disapproval. But this was not a feudal-

1.For a first-hand account of the incident see Tabtaba'i's recently published notes in *Yaddasht-ha-ye Montasher Nashodeh-ye Seyyed Mohammad Tabatab'i*, Hasan Tabtab'I (ed.))Tehran: Nashr-e Abi, 2003)

aristocratic system such as France under the Bourbons. It was the ancient Iranian arbitrary state and society.

It would be necessary at this point to make a few remarks about the old theory that the Constitutional Revolution was a bourgeois revolution; the alternative theory - long-discredited but recently revived in the Islamic Republic - that it was plotted and organised by Britain merely to weaken Russian influence in Iran being no longer in fashion, it does not deserve serious discussion. Iran's arbitrary state and society were far from a feudal entity, the decline of which along well-known Marxian lines might have been associated with the rise of a commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, who would then have launched a revolution to extend their own social and political power. Furthermore, a study of the Iranian economy in the 19th century has shown that in some fundamental ways there was economic regress rather than progress, and that modern technology was acquired largely for the purpose of minority luxury consumption, with the major exception of the telegraph which had a wide ranging social and economic impact, not least in facilitating the spread of protest and revolt. Shifts in foreign trade – especially the continuing rise in the import of European consumer goods and the massive decline in the export of Iranian textiles - were not economically beneficial, although they increased the fortunes of big foreign merchants and enhanced their social position. There had been no capital accumulation worth talking about, there were virtually no roads other than animal tracks, and the economy was in a very poor shape with rampant inflation, continually widening balance-of-payments deficits and the vicious circle of foreign concessions and foreign indebtedness[1].

At the turn of the century, far from reflecting accumulation of finance and technology pressing for revolutionary change along the Marxist theory of bourgeois revolutions, the country was displaying signs of chaos and disintegration, familiar from similar situations throughout Iranian history. The constitutionalists campaigned, not for less legal restriction à la European bourgeois revolutions; indeed, there was hardly any trade restrictions in that

1. For a detailed documentation for economic change in the 19th century see Katouzian (1981), chapter 3.

sense, which they might have wanted to reduce. Not less government, but arbitrary government was their target.

It was not class conflict but state-society conflict that brought disparate forces together to demand law itself. And nowhere was this demand expressed as eloquently and vehemently as in a sermon by Seyyed Jamal al-Din Isfahani, of which the following is a short specimen:

People! Nothing would develop your country other than subjection to law, observation of law, preservation of law, respect for law, implementation of the law, and again law, and once again law. Children must from childhood read and learn at schools that no sin in religion and the *shari'eh* is worse than opposing the law…Observing religion means law, religion means law, Islam, the Koran, mean God's law. My dear man, *qanun, qanun.* Children must understand, women must understand, that the ruler is law and law alone, and no one's rule is valid but that of the law. The parliament is the protector of law…The legislative assembly and legislature is the assembly which makes law, the sultan is the head of the executive which implements the law. The soldier is defender of the law, the police is defender of the law, justice means law, riches means implementing the law, the independence of the monarchy means rules of the law. In a word, the development of the country, the foundation of every nationality, and the solidarity of every nation arises from the implementation of the law.

3.1. The nature of the revolt

The nature of any revolution may be gauged from its objectives, its proponents, its opponents, and its beneficiaries. In this case the objective which all social classes shared was the establishment of law and abolition of arbitrary government, though there were sectional agendas as well, chief among them being social and economic modernisation. It was not just the merchants and shopkeepers, but virtually the whole of the (urban) society which rose, not against the landlords but against the state: religious dignitaries who in terms of rank and influence were even higher than cardinal archbishops, tribal leaders and provisional khans who ruled their own

territories more powerfully than the average duke or marquis or count, and state officials, the high mandarins who were running the government apparatus, joined the movement. The ranks and leadership of the revolution were packed with royals, royals' relatives, and other Qajar clansmen like Ehtesham al-Saltaneh, Zahir al-Dowleh, Abolhasan Mirza (Sheykh al-Ra'is), Soleyman Mirza, Yahya Mirza, etc., who openly despised the system of arbitrary rule[1].

Thus, the revolution was aimed not against landlords and khans but against the arbitrary state, as such. There was not a single social class as such that stood against it, only the state and its rather meagre forces of coercion, like the revolution of February 1979 seventy years later (though in this case the coercive forces were strong but eventually surrendered to the revolutionaries). And finally, its beneficiaries were both landlords and merchants, in that order: Their property ownership became much stronger now that it was no longer threatened by the state's arbitrary power; and, by the same token, they acquired independent political power and influence.

However, the revolution's triumph did not result in 'bourgeois government', democratic or dictatorial. It rapidly led to the onset of the traditional Iranian chaos in new forms, where replicas of ancient tribal warfare were being enacted even on the floor of the Majlis and through the pages of the newspapers, in addition to the chaos in the provinces and among ancient nomadic tribes[2].[ii] Clearly then, this was a revolution that answered to virtually all the features of traditional Iranian revolts, the major exception being that it aimed for law and against arbitrary rule rather than mere injustice (*zolm*), and it used modern European forms and devices in trying to achieve it.

By January 1906 the protesters had returned from their *bast* to Tehran on the shah's agreement to meet their demands, including the central one of instituting independent judicial courts, which they called *Edalat-khaneh.* Prior to this, the most dramatic attempt to try and persuade them to return, was the mission of Amir Bahador-e Jang, a simple-minded devotee of the shah and

1. See further Katouzian (1983)
2.See further, Katouzian (), chapter 3.

of arbitrary rule, who was sent by Ein al-Dowleh both to plead with them and intimidate them into breaking sanctuary, but if anything, it had backfired[1].

The triumphal return of the *basti*s strengthened the cause of the opponents of the chief minister and the campaigners for constitution. As of this time the Persianised term *qonstitisiyun* still had a strong currency, although, certainly since the Russo-Japanese war, *mashruteh* was also being used for constitutional government. This is worth mentioning because later Mohammad Ali Shah would argue that he and his father had not agreed to *mashruteh* - simply to *qonstitisiyun* - although Mokhber al-Saltaneh warned him that the implications of the latter could be even more radical[2].

Ein al-Dowleh resorted to tactics familiar to the situation from many times and places: stalling, bribery and intimidation. But the point - both long and short - had been reached that such tactics would not work. In February, he drove two constitutionalist activists out of town; in March, he tried to banish none other than Seyyed Jamal al-Din, the radical preacher, although here Behbahani's intervention avoided another confrontation. In April, he called a counsel of the state to shore up support for his own stalling tactics. It was in this meeting that Ehtesham al-Saltaneh (a high official and diplomat of the non-royal branch of the Qajars) clashed with the inimitable Amir Bahador, who was dead opposed to the establishment of independent judicial courts. Meanwhile there were protests in Fars once again from landlords whose properties had been confiscated by Sho'a' al-Saltaneh, the shah's son and (now) former governor-general, and riots in Mashhad over the eternal problem of bread shortage.

Tabataba'i, politically not the most sophisticated but the most disinterested religious leader of the movement, wrote to the shah himself, and in it he spoke of the need for a *Majlis-e Edalat*, and no longer just an *Edalat-khaneh* 'that is, a society consisting of all classes of people, which would see to the people's complaints, and where shah and beggar would be equal[3].'[iii] But the shah never saw the letter, and Ein al-Dowleh replied in his name. The struggle dragged

1. See Tabtaba'i *Yaddasht-ha*.
2.See Hajj Mokhber al-Saltaneh ()
3 . See for the full text of the letter, Kasravi (1996)

until, as is well known, there were clashes leading to the ulama's 'migration' together with many of their adherents, this time to Qom.

Public agitation in Tehran spread further and resulted in large numbers of people led by big merchants taking *bast* in the British legation compound. It is important to note that at the same time, Mohammad Ali Mirza, the heir designate seated in Tabriz (who, as mentioned above , opposed the chief minister) encouraged that city's religious dignitaries to appeal to the shah, attacking 'arbitrary' and 'traitorous' ministers, and supporting the cause of the ulama of Tehran. The pressure was such that the shah, who personally had no stomach at all for the prolongation of the conflict, agreed both to the demand - this time clearly - for a constitution creating an independent legislature, and for the dismissal of Ein al-Dowleh, who, upon further pressure from the public, was sent off to Khorasan.

This was August 1906, and the constitution which was hurriedly written to ensure it would be in time to be signed by the shah and the heir designate (since there were strong rumours that the former was unwell) was signed late in December[iv].[1] Five days later the Shah died, and was succeeded by his son, whom certainly the younger, radical and modernist intellectuals of the movement both disliked and distrusted[2].

The first Majlis, as it came to be known, represented the six classes of people defined for this particular purpose, the ulama, men of royal descent (*shazdeh*s), notables (*a'yan*), merchants, ordinary traders and artisans, but not peasants; nor women, who at the time did not have the vote in almost any country. Its first and foremost task was the preparation and approval of the constitution that was later endorsed by the shah and Mohammad Ali Mirza. Many of the future Iranian politicians found their way to this Majlis, including Vosuq al-Dowleh, Taqizadeh, members of the Hedayat clan, Amin al-Zarb, and others. Mosaddeq was elected but could not meet the mandatory age qualification.

1.Taqizadeh had told Seyyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh that they had been so worried about the shah's death before signing the document that they had begged his Scottish physician to keep him alive long enough for the constitution to be drafted and submitted to him. Conversations with Jamalzadeh, Geneva, January 1978.

2. For detailed descriptions of events see Kasravi (1983).

3.2. The politics of elimination

This Majlis soon came into increasingly destructive conflict, both with the new shah and with Nuri and his followers who were critical of what they saw as Europeanising policies and legislation. There was also serious conflict between constitutionalist moderates and radicals, but this did not come into full light until after the shah and Nuri had been defeated : 'No matter how many times the few of us [moderates] tried to bring the two sides to the middle it would not work'[1]. The conflict ended up with the shah's coup in June 1908, which was supported by Nuri and his group. However, resistance to the coup began by the ulama in Najaf and the *mojahedin* of Tabriz, and in July1909 the revolutionary armies from Azerbaijan, Gilan and Isfahan captured Tehran.

Perhaps the victory of 1906 had been too easily won and the further conflict and confrontation was inevitable. But beyond that and beyond the mere personality traits of the chief antagonists (which were obviously important) was the more-or-less impersonal logic of the situation which had deep-seated roots in the country's history. Successful traditional Iranian revolts against absolute and arbitrary rule had invariably led to generalised chaos. This meant the division of arbitrary power among various claimants until one of them would succeed in eliminating the rest and imposing absolute rule once again. The reason for this is fairly clear. In traditional conflicts there had been unity among the rebels in overthrowing the state, but no common agreement on who or what should replace it, other than 'just rule' which all of them could claim to want to establish. Hence, within a short space of time there would be deadly conflict with devastating results for the society, and not least, ordinary people[2].

In a superficial comparison, this would look familiar from European revolts and revolutions as well. The English civil wars and revolution, for example, led eventually to an irreconcilable conflict in which, on the whole, the Army and Independents triumphed before the onset of the movement that led to the march of General Monck's troops that brought Charles II to

1 . Mokhber al-Saltaneh, *Khaterat va Khatarat*, p. 150. This is a useful source for a good, though characteristically brief, account of these conflicts.
2. See further, Katouzian (2007)

power[1].The French revolution led to famous struggles between constitutional monarchists and various republican tendencies which were followed by the Thermidor, the coup of 18th Brumaire by Bonaparte, the First Empire, and the eventual restoration of the Bourbons[2]. The Russian revolutions of 1917 also went through various stages of the elimination of the liberals, then Mensheviks, then left SRs and anarchists, then the left and right opposition within the Communist party, led by Trotsky and Bukharin until Stalinism was firmly and unequivocally established[3].

Yet the Iranian experience had been different in some fundamental ways. European revolutions were campaigns, not for law, but for changes in the law that would extend more rights to wider classes of the society. Therefore, their success did not establish law itself, which, in some form or another had existed before, but a new law or constitutional framework. Hence, conflicts after the triumph of the revolutions was about the kind of new law that was to be established, and this often reflected the conflicting interests of the social classes which had been represented in the revolution.

In the Constitutional Revolution Mohammad Ali Shah and his close advisors - if not hoping to reverse the clock completely - wished to retain as much executive power as possible. The Majlis in general did not trust the shah, and insisted on exercising much of the executive functions as well. It saw itself as The House of the People (*Khaneh-ye Mellat*), as opposed to The State. In

1. See further, Wedgwood, *The King's Peace, 1637-1641* (London; Collins, 1958), *The King's War, 1641-1647* (London: Collins, 1958), *The Trial of Charles I* (London: Collins, 1964); Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution, 1640* (London: Lawrence and) Wishart Ltd, 1940), and *A Century of Revolution, 1603-714* (London: Sphere Books, 1969). See also His *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Panther History, 1968), and *God's Englishman, Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972). R. H. Parry (ed.), *The English Civil War and After1642-1658* (London: Macmillan, 1970); E. W. Ives (ed.) *The English Revolution, 1500-1660* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968).

2. See, for example, E. L. Woodward, *French Revolutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); A. Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1956); n. d.); Leo Gershoy, *The Era of the French Revolution(1789-1799)* (Princeton: D. van. Norsrand, 1957), *From Despotism to Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Alfred Cobban, *A History Modern of France: Volume 1: 1715-1799*, vol. 2, *1799-1945*, vol. 3, *1871-1962*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961-1965); Irene Collins , *The Age of Progress, A Survey of European History between 1789 and 1870* (London: Edward Arnold, 1964)

3. See, for example, E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 1917, 1923, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1950-1953); the *Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917-1929* (London: Macmillan, 1980). Lionel Kochan, (*The Russian Revolution*, London: Wayland Publishers, 1971)

other words, although a constitution had apparently removed the traditional basic antagonism between *mellat* (the people or society) and *dowlat* (the state), it still survived in actual attitudes and relationships. Historically, when the state was beaten, the society came on top, with the chaotic consequences that have been noted[1]. Now, for the first time, law had been established to define and regulate the relationship between the state and the people. But neither the state (or what was left of it) nor the society had sufficiently absorbed the fundamental novelty of the situation. Therefore, both the society and the state were still engaged in 'the politics of elimination', trying to eliminate each other as a political force, and hold the reins of power exclusively to themselves.

Apart from that, the constitution had granted so much power to the legislature that even now in the early 21st century would make it difficult to govern the democratic and essentially governable Britain, let alone Iran of the early 20th century in the midst of revolution and anarchy and yet, there were no real parliamentary parties, which might have negotiated with each other and the shah in an attempt to manage the conflicts. Finally, the revolutionary radicals - who were especially influential in some of the official and unofficial *anjoman*s (political associations) - were not in the mood for any compromise at all. Not only did they insist on virtually unlimited people's power, but at the same time, they were impatient to apply European modernisation as much and as quickly as they dreamed.

This was the sharpest end of the conflict in so far as the religious traditionalists were concerned. It certainly is true that Nuri, regarding himself as the most learned *mojtahed* in Tehran – perhaps everywhere outside the *atabat* - felt slighted by the ascendancy of Behbahani as the chief religious leader of the revolution in the capital. But the fears and forebodings of himself and a few other *mojtahed*s, notably Sheykh Mohammad Amoli, Mirza Hasan Tabrizi, Seyyed Ahmad Tabataba'i (brother of the great Tabtaba'i), the Imam Jom'ehs of Tehran and Tabriz, and Hajj Aqa Mohsen Araqi, were not just limited to narrow private self-interest. And, in any case, they tried to make a

1. On the theory of state-society conflict, see further, Katouzian, 'The Short-Term Society' and 'Towards a General Theory.

public case for their opposition, as will be noted below, although eventually they sided with the shah against constitutional government.

The first test was the government of Amin al-Soltan. He had been very unpopular as chief minister both before and after the death of Naser al-Din Shah, and had left the country after his fall in September 1903. Now it looked as if someone as able, pragmatic and wily as he could try and bring a compromise. He had the support of Behbahani and other moderates, but both the radicals and the shah distrusted him, for apart from purely personal considerations, his success would have reduced the chances of total triumph either by the shah or by the radicals, especially as it was likely to have the support of both Russia and Britain. His assassination, at the end of August 1907, was a consequence of such fears by those opposite forces. There have been lengthy discussions and debates on whether the shah or the Democrats organised the assassination. The balance of argument and evidence shows that Abbas Aqa, the young radical activist from Tabriz, had shot the fatal bullet, but there is very little doubt that the shah's party received the news with a sigh of relief, and that perhaps they themselves were pursuing the same end when they were relieved of the task by the other side[1].

Perhaps the fate of Naser al-Molk's cabinet demonstrates the problem of the moderate, compromise-seeking parties in a less ambiguous way. Atabak's assassination had been followed by a ministry led by Mirza Ahmad Khan Moshir al-Saltaneh, a man of the shah's party. Predictably, his term of office

1. Of the contemporary sources, Mokhber al-Saltaneh (*Khaterat o Khatarat*, and *Gozaresh-e Iran*) believed that Atabak had been murdered by the shah's hatchet men - Movaqqar al-Saltaneh, Mafakher al-Molk and Modabber al-Soltan - who were certainly around when the Majlis adjourned on that fateful night; Dowlat Abadi (*Hayat-e Yahya*,vol.2,) points out that the Shah did not want Atabak and hints that he may have been planning to have him assassinated, but still believes that Abbas Aqa was the sole assailant; Nazem al-Islam, too (*Tarikh-e Bidari*, vol. 2.) says that Arshad al-Dawleh was intent on arranging Atabak's assassination on behalf of the shah when Abbas Aqa relieved him of the task. Of the later historians, Kasravi (*Tarikh-e Mashruteh*) insists that it was the work of the young revolutionary and none other, although he too is aware of the shah's hostility towards Atabak; Sheykholeslami ('Majera-ye Qatl-e Atabak' in *Qatl-e Atabak va Shanzdah Maqaleh-ye Tahqiqi-ye Digar*, Keyhan: Tehran, 1988) also believes that it was the work of the young man and the secret committee behind him but emphasises - along Nazem al-Islam's lines - that the shah, too, was intent on ridding himself of Atabak. The argument between him and Taqizadeh over this subject has been published in full, where the latter has emphatically and categorically denied any previous knowledge of the assassination of Atabak, and - somewhat unconvincingly - added that he even disapproved of it when it happened. See Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, *Zendegi-ye Tufani*, ed., Iraj Afshar (second edition, Tehran, 1993)

was short lived, giving way to Naser al-Molk's, which was largely made up of politically moderate and sophisticated, and financially honest constitutionalists such as the brothers Mirza Hasan Khan Moshir al-Dowleh and Mirza Hoseyn Khan Mo'tamen al-Molk, and the brothers Mortezaqoli Khan Sani' al-Dowleh and Mehdiqoli Khan Mokhber al-Saltaneh. It only lasted a few weeks, while the shah was preparing his first open assault on the Majlis and the radical newspapers *Ruh al-Qodos* and *Mosavat* would not even stop short of publishing invectives against the person of the shah and his mother[1].

In mid-December, large numbers of ruffians took to the streets shouting slogans against constitutional government: 'We follow the Koran, we do not want *mahsruteh*'; 'We want the Prophet's faith, we do not want *mashruteh*'. It is little known that the Jewish community had been forced to join the demonstrations, but - being distinct in their community attire - they explained that it would look farcical for them to shout, 'We want the Prophet's faith'. Hence they followed the Muslim crowd shouting, 'On behalf of the Muslims we do not want *mashruteh* '[2]. At the same time as the mob set up tents in the Artillery Square, not far from Baharistan, the parliament square, the shah summoned, abused, dismissed and arrested his ministers, threatening to kill Naser al-Molk, the first Iranian Oxford graduate, who was saved by the intervention of the British legation on the condition that he would leave Iran, as he duly did, next morning. This shows clearly how the moderates were caught between the radicals of the two sides[3].

As things turned out, the shah was not yet ready to go the whole length of the way against the Majlis. His hesitation, in fact, helped to turn the situation, and he himself had to sue for reconciliation, however flimsy it in fact was. But in retrospect, it is clear that Naser al-Molk's ministry was the last chance for a

1. On the coarse or obscene language of some of the newspapers and *shabnameh*s see especially Tehrani Katouzian, *Tarikh-e Enqelab-e Mashrutiyat* and Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh*. See further, Homa Katouzian, "Private Parts and Public Discourses in Modern Iran", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28, 2, 2008, pp. 283-290

2. Az qowl-e Mosalmanan mahsruteh nemikhahim

3. See Mokhber al-Saltaneh's eye-witness account in *Khaterat va Khatarat*, and Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh*

compromise, assuming that a compromise would have been at all possible in a situation where most of those concerned did not want one.

The shah was more determined and better prepared next time round, but it is seldom sufficiently noted that he went into action after an unsuccessful attempt on his life, when the Majlis did not let the chief suspect – Heydar Khan Amoghli, known as the 'Bombist' - be prosecuted. He had organised and participated in Atabak's assassination and was later to organise and participate in the assassination of Behbahani - the doyen of the Moderate party - and once again get away with it. Kasravi whose *history* is heavily biased in favour of the Democrats to the extent that he keeps referring to the shah as Mohammad Ali Mirza (as opposed to Shah) nevertheless goes as far as saying:

> For a long time after [the Artillery Square demonstrations] Mohammad Ali Mirza had quietened down and it can be said that he had lost hope in overthrowing the Majlis, and no longer had any plans for it. *However, certain events, one of which was bomb throwing and another, the invectives of* Mosavat *and other newspapers once again shocked him into action and made him think of overthrowing the Majlis*[1].

This was the coup of June 1908 in which the shah's Cossack Brigade led by Russian officers famously bombarded the Majlis, attacked and looted the homes of constitutionalists and their sympathisers, and arrested a large number of younger leaders and activists, which included a couple of Qajar noblemen. Some, including Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh and Ali Akbar Dehkhoda took refuge in the British legation compound and later obtained safe conduct to go abroad. Others such as Jahangir Khan, an editor of Sur-e Esrafil and Malek al-Motekallemin, the popular preacher, were killed on the shah's order. So was Seyyed Jamal al-Din Isfahani whom they caught in the west of the country while on the run. These were dastardly acts by a deceitful arbitrary ruler. But the part of the radical constitutionalists in helping him bring about the situation was not lost on an old leader with such impeccable credentials as Abdorrahim Talebof, who wrote to Dehkhoda in exile

1.Kasravi, Tarikh-e Mashruteh, p. 578, emphasis added

condemning zealous and excessive behaviour by the idealists and the mob alike[1].

The coup led to numbness at first, but the people of Tabriz rose and took over their town and through heroic resistance led by the legendary folk leader Sattar Khan held the revolutionary fort until other provinces - Gilan, Isfahan, Fars, in particular - also began to move against the shah's unlawful government. The government laid siege to Tabriz, and almost brought it to its knees by blocking food supplies. At one stage there was a real scare that Russian troops would go to the help of the government forces on the excuse of protecting European lives. The fear was there most of the time, but when in the end they did go (in April 1909), they went to relieve the town from certain famine and the government had to lift the siege.

On 31 August 1907 the Anglo-Russian Convention, subsequently known as the 1907 agreement, was signed in St. Petersburg. This had been actively canvassed and brokered by the French, anticipating 'the triple entente' between the three countries when World War I broke out. It divided Iran into Russian and British spheres of influence and a neutral zone, although it made the largely spurious professions of safeguarding Iran's independence and integrity. This was a deliberate come down by Britain from her position in Iran in anticipation of a European war which everyone expected. Yet while it visibly reduced the level of official British sympathy for the constitutionalists, it later became known that Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, had played a role in discouraging the Russians from overt intervention on the shah's behalf. This was largely due to pressure brought from within the British government and politics by those, headed by Lord Curzon, who were opposed to the 1907 agreement. Therefore, as the shah continued to behave tactlessly and inconsistently, and lose support in the country, even the Russians began to lose confidence in him, so that in the end, the two great powers publicly demanded that he restores a form of constitutional government and sues for compromise[2].[v] They did not wish to help bring down his government, but their

1.See for details, Katouzian, 'Liberty and Licence' in *Iranian History and Politics*, p. 152.
2. See for example, Tehrani Katouzian, *Tarikh-e Enqelab*

joint statement was helpful in boosting the morale of the revolutionaries who had believed that the Russians would defend Mohammad Ali to the bitter end

Strangely enough the turn of events was somewhat similar to those of the revolution in 1979, when the shah was constantly a step or two behind events, not taking the right step at the right time, acting indecisively thus emboldening his radical opposition, and losing the confidence of Western powers, who, though they did not wish him to be deposed, were no longer prepared to commit themselves totally to his defence. It is difficult to know whether it would have been possible for the opposition to sell to the people a peaceful settlement with Mohammad Ali, or, if possible, for the settlement to be long lasting in view of Mohammad Ali's duplicitous and untrustworthy character, rather reminiscent of Charles I of England. Yet it is very instructive that, of all the people, Taqizadeh, the then tribune of the radical revolutionaries, expressed profound regret, in his old age, to Iraj Afshar for his total rejection of the shah's offer of a return to constitutional regime short of his deposition (see further below)[1].

4. Rejection of compromise

It is worth documenting this historically important event briefly. The siege of Tabriz had been prolonged without success, Isfahan had fallen to the Bakhtiyari and other constitutionalist forces, and among their other communication, both to the shah and the public, the Najaf ulama had declared arbitrary rule forbidden in Islam (*haram*). The news in April 1909 of the fall of the Ottoman Sultan Abulhamid II finally shook the shah's resolve to fight on[2].

After the Russians in effect broke the siege of Tabriz and brought relief to its starving population, the shah began to realise that his chances of victory were very slim, especially as both the Russians and the British were publicly urging both him and the revolutionary leaders to compromise. The British and Russian envoys to Tehran formally saw the shah on behalf of their respective

1. Conversations with Iraj Afshar, Los Angles 1985; See further Homa Katouzian, 'Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh: Seh Zendegi dar Yek Omr' in *Iran Nameh*, special issue on Taqizadeh (guest ed. H. Katouzian)
2. For details of these events, see, for example, Kasravi, Dowlat-Abadi, Nazem al-Islam Kermani and Tehrani Katouzian.

governments, urged him to change the cabinet, declare general amnesty and hold parliamentary elections[1].[vi] He dismissed the reactionary ministry of Mirza Ahmad Moshir al-Saltaneh and appointed Naser al-Molk, the same moderate constitutionalist whom he had sacked and threatened to kill, though since the latter had first to return from exile in Britain, Sa'd al-Dowleh formed a cabinet on his behalf which included moderate constitutionalists such as Mostowfi al-Mamalek and the borthers Moshir al-Dowleh and Mo'tamen al-Molk, most of them members of the moderate cabinet which he had angrily dismissed before the coup[2].[vii] At the same time, he issued a general amnesty for all the constitutionalist fighters, and 'the new cabinet went as far as issuing an edict which forbade any publicly expressed remarks or spreading untruthful rumours against Mashruteh on pain of severe punishment'[3].[viii] They ordered the repair and reconstruction of the Majlis building, and in Kasrvi's words, 'thus Mohammad Ali Shah restored constitutionalism'[4].[ix] Yet, and in spite of his own view that it would have been wrong if the revolutionaries had agreed to compromise, Kasravi goes on to remark that 'the period since March and April in which the shah once again accepted constitutionalism until he was dethroned, must be treated as a separate period [from the Lesser Arbitrary Rule]'.

However, the Gilan militia went ahead and captured Qazvin regardless, but having received the news of the restoration in Tehran and the shah's letter declaring amnesty, one of their two most important chiefs Sephadr-e (later Sepahsalar-e) Tonokaboni ordered them to celebrate by illuminating the town. And a young and highly influential Gilan Militia chief, Mo'ez al-Soltan (later Sardar Moheyy) went as far as telegraphing the shah:

> Today the edict of your majesty was honourably received (*ziyarat shod*). However, it is not clear whether or not [you are referring to] the same constitution…I beg of you to send us an edict confirming that you will immediately open the parliament [the

1. See Dowlat-Abadi, *Hayat-e Yahya*, vol. 2, book 3, pp. 92-94.
2. Ibid, p. 96
3. See Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hijdahsaleh-ye Azarbaijan* (Tehran: Amir Kabir,1992), pp. 19-20; Tehrani Katouzian, *Tarikh-e Enqelab- Mashrutiyat*, p. 758.
4. Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hijdahsaleh*, p. 20; Dowlat-Abadi, *Hayat-e Yahya*, vol.3, p. 96.

> European term is used] and the same constitutional and electoral laws will be implemented[1].

Kasravi goes on to add: 'thus the revolutionaries stayed in Qazvin for a month and a half [and] in Isfahan Sardar As'ad discharged his numerous horse. It was believed that there will no longer be a battle'[2].

Nevertheless, after a lengthy soul searching the forces of Qazvin and Isfahan, as is well known attacked and captured Tehran[3].[x] The forces of Gilan were led by Mohammad-Vali Khan Tonokaboni (the afore-mentioned Sepahdar, later Sepahsalar), and Fathollah Khan Akbar, Sardar Mansur (later Sepahdar)[4].[xi]. Neither of them was a radical, though unlike Sardar Mansur, Sepahdar-Spehsalar had a fiery temper. But their armies included a notable contingent of militiamen from southern Caucasus - especially Baku - almost all of whom were radical democrats or social democrats. The greatest single military leader of the Gilan *mojaheds* was without a doubt Ephrem Khan, the Perisanised revolutionary leader from Armenia and probably a military genius. Morgan Shuster wrote of Ephrem that 'he was the real head and shoulders of the expedition from Resht [Gilan]'[5].

The forces of Isfahan were made up largely, but not entirely, of Bakhtiyari horse and rifle, led by their khans headed by the above-mentioned Aliqoli Khan Sardar As'ad (II). Earlier, and in his absence in Europe, his brother Najafqoli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh had already captured Isfahan.

Happily, the battles outside and inside Tehran neither took long nor heavy casualties. Nor were vindictive measures taken against supporters of the shah's regime – largely due to the influence of the Anglo-Russian powers - but a couple of executions were allowed, including that of Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri. This would not have been possible without the approval of Behbahani and Tabatab'i in Tehran, and Khorasani and Mazandarani in Najaf, witnessed by the fact that they did not object to it after the event. For Nuri, by his actions

1. Ibid, p. 29
2. Ibid, p. 30
3. Ibid, p. 35; Tehrani Katouzian, p. 758-759.
4. He was sometimes known as Sepahdar-e Rashti to distinguish him from the former Sepahdar-e Tonokaboni
5. For an extensive account of Ephrem's career see W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York: The Century Co.), 1912.

much more than his beliefs, had deeply hurt the feelings of the constitutionalists - and especially the leading ulama among them - so that, in the process of the conflict, the three constitutionalist marja's in Najaf publicly condemned him as a *mofsed*, a criminal charge which in Islamic law carries capital punishment[1].

The ulama in Najaf, Khorasani, Mazandarani and Tehrani (who died in 1908) supported the Majlis against the claims both of the Shah and of Nuri, and after the coup threw all their weight behind the movement. It is difficult to see how the movement might have succeeded the way it did if the Najaf ulama had wavered in their support or, indeed, doubted the legitimacy of constitutionalism. On the contrary, they joined battle on the theoretical issue as well, arguing that arbitrary rule was not legitimate in Islam, and that constitutional government was not a government of licence and chaos, but one based in law, in which the government was responsible to the public, and the people were equal before the law[2].[xii] Their interpretation of constitutional government was sound, but that is not the spirit in which the country, even most of its leaders, responded to the new regime: the second decade of the twentieth century was a period of growing licence rather than rising liberty.

However, at the moment of the onslaught of Mohammad Ali's Cossack force on the Majlis with Nuri's open support, a European observer (young British diplomat Walter Smart) who described himself as being 'no friend of religion' wrote of the part played by constitutionalist religious leaders and community, that

> in Persia religion has, by force of circumstances, perhaps, found itself on the side of Liberty, and it has not been found wanting. Seldom has a prouder or a stranger duty fallen to the lot of any Church than that of leading a democracy in the throes of revolution, so that [the religious leadership] threw the whole weight of its authority and learning on the side of liberty and progress, and made possible the regeneration of Persia in the way of constitutional Liberty[3].

1. For the text of the great ulama's fatva see Katouzian *State and Society*, chapter 2.
2. The views of the maraj's were expressed in the writings of two leading Najaf *mojtahed*s, Hajj Mirza Hoseyn Nai'ini and Sheykh Mohammad Esma'il Gharavi Mahallati. See, for example, Nazem al-Islam, *Tarikh-e Bidari*
3.This occurs in a letter from Smart in Tehran to his former teacher Edward Browne in Cambridge. See Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, p.164

Smart's surprise was quite understandably due to his appraisal of the situation from the vantage point of European history, where revolutions were led by the lower and underprivileged against the upper and privileged classes, including the established clergy who were generally on the latter's side. It was very difficult from that standpoint to imagine religious pontiffs fighting the state on behalf of the people. Except that this was not a European but an arbitrary state.

It is worth comparing Smart's comment to one by the BBC TV reporter during the revolution of 1978-79, being puzzled by the fact that a man in an expensive suit and Pierre Cardin tie was dancing around a burning tire and shouting anti-shah and pro-Khomeini slogans[1]: in the constitutional revolution the society rose against the traditional arbitrary state for law and modernisation, therefore, the revolutionary moderns had the upper hand vis-à-vis the revolutionary traditionals who followed their project and slogans; seventy years later the society rose once again, this time against the pseudo-modernist arbitrary state, and so the moderns followed the project and slogans of the traditionals. In the former revolution a few traditionals, notably Sheik Fazlollah, were full of forebodings about the consequences, but were rejected by the majority of the traditionals. In the latter revolution some moderns, notably Shapur Bakhtiar were full of forebodings about the consequences, but were rejected by the majority of moderns. Thus, with largely different agendas and results, both revolutions were nevertheless a product of state-society, as opposed to class, conflict and antagonism[2].

5. Chaos, disillusionment and arbitrary rule

The triumph of 1909 did not and could not turn the country into paradise on earth overnight, as had been hoped by many a revolutionary. It could possibly have led to gradual reforms and developments resulting in long-lasting achievements. If the constitutional restoration had led to a relatively peaceful and cohesive system resulting in gradual developments in politics, society and

1.See further, Homa Katouzian, 'The Iranian Revolution at 30: The Dialectic of State and Society', *Middle East Critique*, 19, 1, 35-53, spring 2010.

2. See further, Katouzian, *The Persians*, chapter 12, and 'Towards a General Theory of Iranian Revolutions'.

the economy, only die-hard reactionaries, who had very few well-wishers at the time, would have harked back to Mohammad Ali's hated reign. It was because the ideals of political development were quickly lost that hopes gave way to despair, and harsh government came to be valued over persistent chaos.

Thus the old habits of discord and lack of social cohesion and cooperation, and the attitude of total gain or total loss - in short, the politics of elimination - was too ingrained to make peaceful developments possible. By that time constitutionalism had fallen into such disrepute that anyone who had benefited by it would be described as having 'made it to his constitutionalism' and anywhere there was rioting, looting and pillage people would say 'there was constitutionalism' (*mashruteh shod*)[1]. Naser al-Din Shah was now lovingly referred to as the Martyred Shah (*Shah-e Shahid*), and many if not most of the former revolutionaries who had rejected Mohammad Ali Shah's late offer of reconciliation now began to attribute the entire revolution to a British conspiracy to outsmart the Russians in Iran, conveniently forgetting their condemnation of Britain precisely for withdrawing its public support of the revolution as a result of the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907. Once again one can see the analogy between that and the attitude of the disillusioned participants of the revolution of 1978-79 who rejected Mohammad Reza Shah's late plea for compromise and insisted that he should go at all cost, but later became convinced that it was not they but the Anglo-American powers who had instigated and run the revolution[2].

Still, there were few of the radical leaders of the constitutional revolution who saw their own role in helping to bring about the situation which they now deeply regretted. Kasravi, who much later argued that the rejection of compromise was right[3], claimed that Taqizadeh and Mosavat had been the main culprits and had unsuccessfully tried to arrange one:

> …Messrs. Taqizadeh and Mosavat and their associates… were trying to stop the revolution from continuing … and much

1. See the contemporary historian Sheykh Mohammad Mardukh Kurdistani, quoted directly in Mehdi Bamdad, *Sharh-e Hal-e Rejal-e Iran*, vol. 6 (Tehran: Zavvar, 1992), pp. 133-135. See also p. 293, on another case of 'constitutionalising [i.e. looting] the people'
2. See Homa Katouzian, 'The Iranian Revolution at 30'; *The Persians*, chapter 12.
3. Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Hjidahsaleh*, chapters 3-5.

> preferred it to come to an end through their own intervention and negotiation, so that they themselves would reap the final fruits[1].

However, much further to Taqizadeh's confession of regrets cited above for having done the opposite, important new evidence shows that both he and Mosavat greatly regretted their erstwhile radicalism, which as Mosavat puts it, had been responsible for the Iranian malaise as was witnessed by them:

> …The greatest pain which burns my heart is lack of success. In addition to that , our actions were responsible for the damages made to the country and its people…I am constantly burning in the thought as to how it would be possible for us to remove this blot of shame which today has darkened the beautiful face of Iran, and which will be registered in our names. Or will this collar of damnation hang around the necks of Taqizadeh and Mosavat till the Day of Judgement and, until the end of time Iranians will remember them like they do Shimr of Kufa and Yazid of Syria?[2].

That was April 1920. The chaos that had followed the revolution had been such that constitutionalism quickly fell into disrepute. By the end of World War I there were genuine and largely justified fears that the country would fall apart. Such fears were the main motive force behind the 1919 agreement, and the failure of that agreement was the main cause of the coup d'etat of February 1921 which led to Reza Khan Pahlavi's dictatorship and, later, arbitrary rule.

6. Conclusion

This paper brings together a description and analysis of various aspects of the constitutional revolution. The constitutional movement began slowly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the defeats of Iran by Russia, and greater contact with Russia and other European powers, especially Britain, had opened a completely new window to the Iranian elite. Defeating and being defeated, even ruled, by foreigners had been quite familiar

1. Ibid, p. 30. See also pp. 29 and 34
2. Nameh-ha-ye Tehran (154 letters of friends to Taqizadeh), ed., Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Farzan, 2006), p. 111. This is a long letter generally on the same theme as above.

occurrences in the country's history. So had the imposition or importation, since ancient times, of foreign traditions, habits, religions, products and commodities. The early modernisers had focussed their attention on the acquisition of modern techniques and military organisation. They sent a few state students to Europe, and later founded the Dar al-Fonun or *Politechnique*. The concern with the technological gap reached its height, perhaps, when Mostashar al-Dawleh declared that construction of railways would be the key to Iranian development. But later he came to the belief that Law – i.e. the abolition of arbitrary rule - was the most necessary requirement.

The importance of law had been emphasised both in Malkam Khan's writings and in Sephsalar's constitutional framework. It did not take long for the campaign for law and modernisation - which, as noted, were believed to be directly connected together - to take a definitely rebellious form. Malkam Khan began to publish the newspaper *Qanun* in London against the shah and for constitutional government, which was smuggled into Iran and was potent in spreading the idea among a larger elite.

The absence of law perforce meant the absence of politics, since it is only within a long-term legal framework where rights and obligations are defined that independent thoughts and actions become possible. Revolutions normally occur when the state is weak, even though revolutionary ideas and agendas may have been advanced over a period of time. In Iranian history, at any rate, weakness of the state always ran the risk of rebellion. For even at seemingly peaceful times the state was normally unpopular and the society potentially rebellious. The nature of any revolution may be gauged from its objectives, its proponents, its opponents, and its beneficiaries. In this case the objective which all social classes shared was the establishment of law and abolition of arbitrary government, though there were sectional agendas as well, chief among them being social and economic modernization.

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