

# Why the Shah Fell

*Walter Laqueur*

THE Iranian crisis is far from over; in fact it may still be in its early stages. Nevertheless, the mythmakers are already hard at work. According to one school of thought, the cause of the recent uprisings and the fall of the Shah is to be sought in the "very bad economic situation." According to another, the crisis was provoked by the great "social injustices" in Iran. According to a third, it was the "stifling political atmosphere" which caused the explosion. All of these may be true, but what do they explain? The economic situation in most Third World countries (and indeed in many others) is certainly much worse than in Iran; social injustice is equally glaring; the political atmosphere at least as stifling. Why, then, Iran?

Partly it was a failure of the ruling elite. The Shah was isolated, cut off from the people whose aspirations he thought he embodied. As Lord Curzon wrote in the early 20th century about another Shah: "The exigencies of his rank and position render it almost impossible for him to receive the assistance which tried and independent counselors can afford. The attitude and language employed toward him are those of servile obedience and adulation: 'May I be your sacrifice, Asylum of the Universe' is the common mode of address adopted by subjects of the highest rank."

The language in which the Shah was addressed had changed somewhat since Curzon's days, but it does seem to be true that while no one had dared to lie to the Shah's father, few dared to tell the truth to the son. Mohammed Reza Pahlevi showed an awareness of this problem when he wrote that in Iran the entire tradition surrounding the Shah accentuated his loneliness, and that though he himself was less forbidding in demeanor (his own words!) than his father, his role inevitably kept him at arm's length from other people. But the Shah was still convinced that he could rely on God's support, that God had ordained him to do for Iran things that no one else could do.

Indeed, after a shaky, uncertain beginning the

Shah had been quite successful. The "White Revolution" of 1963 was given qualified acclaim even by many of his critics; the Muslim clergy, which condemned it at the time as the work of the devil, came reluctantly to accept it, especially after the oil windfall of the 1970's, leading to a growth rate of 35 per cent and 42 per cent in 1974 and 1975 respectively, opened breathtaking vistas to Iran's development. In the early 1970's, with the Shah at the height of his power and his political opponents in a state of disarray, Iran seemed to be making quick progress.

But the appearance was deceptive. In fact, the enormous oil royalties were mishandled by the Shah's regime; by 1975 the boom was out of control, and by 1976 it was clear that Iran was vastly overspending. The official goals, which included a more or less complete welfare system, were over-ambitious in every respect. By October 1976, the Shah admitted partial failure:

We have not demanded self-sacrifice from people, rather we have covered them in cotton wool. Things will now change. Everyone should work harder and be prepared for sacrifices.

But nothing is more difficult in politics than to carry out an orderly retreat, and even when the boom ended, everyone still expected its benefits to last forever.

In retrospect it is obvious that these years should have been used to reform the political system and to broaden its base. Instead, there were manifestations of a growing arrogance. In 1974, the Shah announced that within the next quarter of a century Iran was bound to become one of the world's five mightiest powers, and his minister of finance predicted that it would be among the first five in per-capita income as well. Dazzled by the enormity of the windfall, the Shah failed to understand the grave difficulties the country would have in absorbing the new wealth. More important still, the Shah and those surrounding him did not realize that an old-style monarchy was no longer effective in providing legitimacy to the regime. It was not only the economy that had to be modernized, but also the political structure. A growing number of people, including most of the educated class, found the medieval pomp and circumstance humiliating and ridiculous.

This was the real weakness of the regime—not

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that it was a "tool" of U.S. "imperialism," or that it engaged in savage repression and widespread corruption. Both of these charges are seriously exaggerated.

It is true that the CIA had saved the Shah in the early 1950's—with an investment of less than half a million dollars—but thereafter he had followed an independent nationalist policy. It is also true that Iran received American help in the 1950's, but Yugoslavia received more than twice as much, and no one accused Tito of being an American satellite. Since the early 1960's, the Shah frequently used Washington for his own purposes; it would be difficult to point to many instances in which he was used by the Americans. (In 1963, the Shah promised the Soviet Union that he would not provide bases to foreign powers on Iranian soil, and for the next ten years excellent relations prevailed between the two countries; the Soviets even condemned the anti-Shah demonstrations of the "reactionary mullahs" in the 1960's. All this changed only in the 1970's, when Moscow switched its support to Iraq and the radical elements in the Gulf.) The nationalization of the oil companies in 1973 was hardly a step serving Western interests; among OPEC members, moreover, Iran was until recently among those pressing for very substantial rises each year.

Thus, the Shah's foreign policy was not pro-Western, but pro-Iranian. As he saw it, Iran could not in any case count on long-term American and European support, in view of the general decadence of those societies. If he looked for American military supplies, it was for the obvious reason that without such assistance Iran, like Afghanistan, would be sucked into the Soviet sphere of influence. Such a policy of trying to avoid Russian domination has been followed traditionally by all Persian rulers and will also be followed by future ones no matter what their political philosophy—unless, of course, their loyalty happens to be not to Iran but to a foreign country.

This is not to say that the charges made against the Shah's rule were completely without grounds. There was corruption, the new wealth was unequally distributed, and Savak, the political police, engaged until about two years ago in brutal repression. To take these accusations one by one: the Shah himself was a very wealthy man, and was not out for personal gain, but the same could not be said of all his numerous family and many of his ministers and other hangers-on. Corruption in Iran, as in most Oriental countries, is an endemic problem; in this connection it is useful to recall that until quite recently officials were not paid by the state but were expected to enrich themselves through time-honored ways and means. The new prosperity magnified this sort of corruption, against which the periodical clean-up drives were quite ineffectual.

Prosperity also brought about greater income inequality, as Charles Issawi and other students

of the Iranian economy have pointed out. This is a phenomenon common to all rapidly developing countries, whatever their social system, and it was further accentuated by regional differences between the prosperous northern provinces and the more backward southern regions. But this inequality was not the main factor swelling the anti-Shah movement: Teheran, with one-tenth of Iran's population, accounts for one-third of the country's expenditure, and it was precisely in the capital (and in some religious centers such as Qum) that the opposition was strongest.

Lastly, the question of repression. There has been a great deal of violence in Iran since World War II. Two prime ministers have been assassinated (Ali Rasmara and Ali Mansur), and there have been attempts to kill others, as well as the Shah. The Iranian government under the Shah responded by mass arrests, by torture, and by executions. According to sources hostile to the regime, there were about 20,000 political prisoners in the early 1970's; the Shah admitted to only 3,000. But even if the higher figure was correct, it was still proportionately smaller than in countries such as Cuba; and even if more death penalties were imposed in Iran than elsewhere, the number of actual killings was higher in neighboring Iraq, to give but one example. Yet there were no demonstrations in Western capitals in favor of human rights in Cuba or Iraq, and this, of course, is the decisive factor. The impression was created in the Western media that Iran was a more brutal dictatorship than others, whereas it was in fact only less effective.

THE anti-Shah movement gained momentum not at a time of increased repression, but on the contrary, at a time when the regime was trying to reform itself and to offer a greater degree of liberty, partly under pressure from outside. Was the collapse inevitable? Robert Graham concludes, at the end of a massive indictment of Iranian government incompetence and folly:

To cast the Shah as the villain is in one sense misleading. There is nothing to suggest that another leader or group of leaders in Iran would have done better or behaved much differently under the circumstances. It would be surprising if the same basic motivations did not apply: namely, preservation of personal power, a concern with prestige, a chauvinistic pride in seeking Iranian solutions, and a general impatience with detail. The Shah's critics decry his authoritarianism, but there is scarcely a liberal tradition in Iranian history.\*

Fred Halliday, the author of a study of Iran written from an extreme left-wing point of view, reaches conclusions which are not much different. Noting the internal division of the Iranian Left,

\* *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (London, 1978).

its preoccupation with rhetoric, its tendency to look for ideological guidance from notions borrowed from abroad, the subservience of the Tudeh (Communist) party to the Soviet Union, Halliday expresses skepticism about the Left's ability to administer power, let alone to produce a democratic alternative to the Shah.\*

Circumstances, one has to agree with Robert Graham, were not propitious, and the oil boom turned out to be not a blessing but a curse. But the disaster was not foreordained. If there is a lesson to be learned, it is surely that in our age a more effective (and repressive) method of dictatorship is needed for survival in Third World countries than old-fashioned autocratic monarchy. If the Shah had been able to transform himself into a Middle East Castro, all would have been forgiven—the indifferent economic performance, the political oppression, the intellectual regimentation.

A comparison with the late Colonel Boumédiène of Algeria is quite instructive on this point. Boumédiène's achievements were hardly impressive—about a third of the Algerian workforce is unemployed, wholly or in part, despite the boost given to the country's economy by oil revenues. Any criticism of the regime is severely dealt with, and the erstwhile leaders of the Algerian revolution have been assassinated or are in prison. Boumédiène was in a way a more farsighted ruler than the Shah; *he* would have never permitted tens of thousands of students to leave for abroad and have paid for their studies. In Iran the breakthrough of the opposition came after freedom of assembly had been granted *de facto*, which is again something Boumédiène would never have done. The Shah released his chief political antagonist (Mossadeq) after a short while; Boumédiène kept the man he overthrew in prison to the last day of his life. There is a great and growing inequality of both income and living standards in Algeria, but this, unlike the case in Iran, is discreetly hidden. Much has been written about overcrowding and high rents in Teheran as one of the causes of the revolution there, yet in Algiers sixteen people on the average live in one apartment; the rents, outside the slums, are every bit as high as in Iran; and even if Boumédiène did not die a rich man, some of his colleagues in the leadership amassed fortunes as the result of property speculation. Yet because of the crucial difference in how the regime was conducted, when the Algerian leader died, he was mourned by many millions of his compatriots as a hero and liberator, a man of the people. This image was also accepted almost without question abroad. On a single day *Le Monde* devoted five solid pages to the memory of a great democrat and humanist, while, according to the (*Manchester Guardian*), Boumédiène was a "good man" and a "good liberal." This, of a man whose regime was more anti-democratic than the Shah's.

The Shah, in contrast to the Castros of the world, was quite incapable of playing the part of a "man of the people": cold, remote, a bad public speaker, he had considerable political intelligence but utterly lacked both charisma and the demagoguery needed to be a successful modern-style dictator. He did not even pretend that he was an egalitarian. Nor was he familiar with the uses of contemporary myths and the techniques of modern mass manipulation. He labored under yet another considerable handicap, that of having been at the helm of his country for almost four decades. During this period, Egypt was headed by Farouk, Neguib, Nasser, and Sadat; Syria and Iraq by dozens of colonels, generals, and prime ministers; America by seven Presidents; and even Russia by at least four sets of rulers. Only in Iran did the same ruler stay on and on; as a result, all the complaints and all the frustrations were directed at him. In a volatile country, he became the target and the victim of the natural human desire for variety and change.

But even with this great handicap the Shah could still have done better. He could have either destroyed the power of the Islamic clergy, thus continuing the policy of his father, or alternatively, if he felt he was not strong enough to do so, he could have made greater concessions so as not to antagonize them. He could have worked for a reconciliation with the middle class, which in its majority had supported Mossadeq's "National Front." This class greatly benefited under the Shah's rule, but it lacked and wanted political power, which the Shah had no desire to share. The treatment of the intelligentsia was equally short-sighted. The Shah showed far more sensitivity in dealing with workers and peasants than with the intelligentsia, whom he did not even try to understand. He was accustomed to being flattered, but he did not flatter others, he did not infuse enthusiasm, and he did not try to heal old wounds, to persuade, to placate, to make friends. He did not care whether he was loved but rather deliberately cultivated the image of the stern, remote, but just autocrat. And thus in the end he found himself in greater isolation than the last of the Czars.

## II

THE Iranian Left was the most consistent enemy of the Shah, but it played only a modest part in the movement which led to his downfall. The Left cannot be ignored, however, in a contest for power which may go on for a long time. A political factor of considerable importance in the 1940's and early 1950's, the Left has for two decades been bitterly divided into several factions, and its influence on the whole has been much stronger among Iranians abroad than inside the country.

\* *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (London, 1979).

The downfall of the Tudeh (Communist) party in the 1950's was partly the result of police repression and perhaps even more of infiltration, but there were other reasons as well. While the party at the time denied its Communist character, it was, in fact, one of the most Stalinist of all, and it has not wavered in its pro-Soviet orientation since. Its dependence on the Soviet Union has been a source of both strength and weakness; it got considerable assistance from the Soviet Union and the East European countries, but whenever relations between the Communist bloc and the Shah improved, its activities were restricted, and even its radio station (located in Bulgaria) was closed down on occasion. Furthermore, this dependence on a foreign power limited the party's appeal in a country with strong nationalist traditions.

Following on the Sino-Soviet split, several pro-Chinese groups broke from Tudeh and some of them founded their own organization which bitterly attacked the "agents of Soviet imperialism." They agreed with the pro-Soviet wing that the government of the Shah should be overthrown, but they equally opposed a regime which would cast its lot with the Soviet Union. For according to Tudeh, Iranian foreign policy has to take into account the 2,500 kilometers of common border with the Soviet Union, the proximity to a country infinitely more powerful than Iran, which can both offer great advantages and mete out punishment. The "highest national interests" are invoked by Tudeh to persuade Iran to place itself, Finland-like, under the Soviet umbrella. This, of course, is anathema to the pro-Chinese wing. But the pro-Chinese elements have in turn been gravely compromised by Peking's policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Shah; this came to a head in early September 1978 during Hua Kuo Feng's visit to Teheran.

In addition to the now divided Maoist and pro-Chinese elements, at least two more leftist factions should be mentioned: the Trotskyites, also split into several sects, and sundry "independent Marxists" deriving their inspiration from the New Left. These continuously accuse one another of deviating from Marxism, of being pseudo-revolutionaries, of engaging in opportunistic maneuvers such as striving to enter coalitions with bourgeois elements of the Shi'ite clergy, and of being foreign, or even CIA, agents. In these acrimonious controversies the Shah is seen alternatively as Nicholas II, Chiang Kai-shek, or Adolf Hitler, with the Ayatollah Khomeini viewed as Father Gapon (of 1905 fame) or the Red Dean of Canterbury, and the Iranian liberals as the Russian Cadets, the Zemstvo, or at best the left wing of the Kuomintang. In a recent interview, one Teheran university student leader of the extreme Left noted bitterly of the religious students that "when they say they want an 'Islamic government' and you ask them what they mean, they can't

really tell you. . . ." For their part, the Marxist-Leninists are proud to have an answer, and little does it matter that it is a rehash from another age and another continent.

Lastly, the terrorist Left: this includes one Maoist faction and two other groups, the Iranian People's Fidajin Guerrillas and the Organizations of the People's Combatants, better known as the Mojahidin. The Fidajin began their activities in 1971 and drew their inspiration from Che Guevara, and to an even greater degree from Régis Debray (even though Debray had made it known that he no longer believed his own theories formulated in the 1960's). According to the Fidajin, patient, political work of the kind recommended by Tudeh and others was pointless. The regime was too strong, and the consciousness of the working class not sufficiently developed. There was only one way to mobilize the masses, namely armed struggle. The Mojahidin, on the other hand, who originated among a group of theology students, initially advocated a synthesis of Islam and Marxism, but subsequently, in their majority, renounced their erstwhile Islamic orientation. Between 1971 and 1976 they killed several Iranian police officials and some members of the U.S. military mission. The political effect of their actions was very nearly nil, and they hardly contributed to the wave of anti-Shah demonstrations in late 1977.

Almost all of the terrorist Left are students, and while they have had sympathizers among the intelligentsia, political activity among industrial workers has remained very much a Tudeh preserve. Among the peasants and the minorities, none of the left-wing organizations has had any influence.

IT HAS been said that the fragmentation of the Iranian Left was the inevitable result of suppression and defeat, and that in the new revolutionary period they may put aside their doctrinal and organizational quarrels and establish a common front. But quite apart from doctrinal hair-splitting, there are divisions within the Iranian Left which make a lasting reconciliation unlikely. The question of orientation—pro-Soviet or independent—is only one of these bones of contention. There is also a sharp divergence in motives and outlook.

In some ways Tudeh is the only group that knows what it wants: an Iranian client state, gradually to be transformed into a People's Democracy. Most other Iranian "Marxists" are essentially radical (and confused) nationalists trying to combine inherently contradictory doctrines. Many of them have become almost totally Westernized, but they also consider Westernization undesirable. They claim that by accepting European values the Iranians will reject their origins, become subject to "spiritual exploitation," lose their integrity and self-reliance. Here the romantic Left meets

with the Shi'ite clergy, which has been arguing all along that the materialist West cannot possibly satisfy the soul of the Iranian people. But since the intelligentsia has become accustomed to Western living standards (what with engineers in Teheran earning \$6,000 a month or more) it will have to make a choice—even though, for the time being, it seems only dimly aware of it and continues to profess (as the Shah did, and the mullahs do) that there is a specific “Iranian solution” to the problem.

Such confusion is reminiscent of populist movements in other parts of the globe, with their simultaneous fight for tradition and revolutionary change. Ernst Halperin has interpreted the political struggle in Latin America during the last hundred years in the light of the struggle between old and new oligarchies of civilian or military politicians. The new oligarchies have to conquer the state in order to provide power and prestige for the leaders and bureaucratic positions for their clients; they usually do this under the banner of populism. The same applies with minor changes to the struggle for power in Iran, where religion adds further complications. It is a class struggle of sorts, not in accordance with the classic Marxist pattern, not even between the people and the Shah, but between rival oligarchies.

This is not to say that the sloganizing for freedom, democracy, and social justice is fraudulent; most of those voicing such sentiments genuinely believe that they are acting in the best interests of the whole people, for whom they will provide more freedom and more prosperity than the hated and bankrupt old regime. It is, however, unlikely that their good intentions will be put to a test in the foreseeable future. For even if the Left were not split, it would still be weaker than the other contenders for power. All may agree on the nationalization of the property of foreigners, and perhaps also on the expropriation of some of the super-rich identified with the old regime. But neither the mullahs nor the class of merchants and shopkeepers known as bazaaris (on whom more below) have any intention of abiding by a Tudeh, or Maoist, or Trotskyite regime. The clergy want a veto power on all legislation such as was promised in the first constitution of 1906—a theocracy, in short—and the bazaaris want business as usual.

### III

THE recent political revival of Islam has by now been widely observed, but its manifestations have differed from country to country. In some countries Islam has supported the right wing, elsewhere it cooperates with radical forces; but the main enemy is always secularization.

The resurgence of Islam as a political force was one of the causes of Ali Bhutto's downfall in Pakistan; it is one of the reasons behind the pres-

ent unrest in Turkey; and even President Bourguiba of Tunisia, who at one time favored the abolition of the veil and other reforms, has had to beat a hasty retreat. Whatever the long-term prospects of this revival, it certainly will be a factor of considerable importance for years to come.

The Shah and his court never failed to pay homage to Shi'ism, the state religion. He took every opportunity to stress his belief in God, always maintained that his reforms were in conformity with the prescriptions of Islam, and went on pilgrimages to Meshed and other holy cities. But with all this, the Shah was regarded by the mullahs and ayatollahs as a modernizer, and hence a threat to their power. This conflict went back to the rule of the Shah's father, who carried out many reforms and encouraged the removal of the veil. Thereafter, there were ups and downs in the relations between the clergy and the monarchy. In the late 1940's the clerical opposition to the Shah was headed by an erstwhile Nazi agent; in the 1950's relations improved, but in the following decade the most serious challenge to the Shah's rule was again spearheaded by the clergy.

The latent struggle for power between the mullahs and the Shah entered a new and sharper phase when, more than fifteen years ago, the Shah's government first announced its agrarian-reform program and suffrage and equality for women. The Islamic clergy bitterly denounced these measures as contrary to the spirit and the letter of Islam. After the death of Borudjerdi, the “Grand Ayatollah,” a fiery and uncompromising theology teacher named Khomeini emerged as the leader of the campaign. Khomeini saw that the agrarian reform would further weaken the position of the clergy in the villages, who were among the largest landowners in the county; and as for the reforms concerning the status of women and the role of religious courts, these were “abominations” whose acceptance would entail giving up positions which Islam has held for more than a thousand years.

Khomeini was exiled to Iraq in 1963, and from there continued his attacks against the Shah's regime. Both the substance of his attacks and his imagery were religious. Thus the Shah became “Yazid”—the Khalif detested more than any other by the Shi'ites. But despite his obscurantism, despite even his occasional denunciations of Marxism, this prince of the church became the darling of the extreme Left. For however reactionary his views in every other respect, on two main counts they were “progressive”: he was against the Shah and he attacked the Americans.

FUNDAMENTALIST Islam, like all fundamentalist religion, has always been xenophobic and intolerant toward infidels; thus, by a stretch of the imagination, it could pass as “anti-imperialist.” The fact that Khomeini and

his colleagues wanted to replace the Shah's system by another autocracy, that they envisaged a state dominated by the clergy and run according to the principles of the *Shariat*, the Islamic law, was of course a little inconvenient for their Western sympathizers. In other countries a movement of this kind would have been branded as "clerico-fascist," but in Iran in the 1970's it became an important, if somewhat unreliable and capricious, ally of the Left. The reasons were quite obvious: the Left was weak and disunited, and could not afford to be choosy. The power of the mullahs was unbroken; the mosque had in recent years been the only place where open criticism of the Shah could be voiced; the clergy could still get the masses into the streets; and the most radical of the ayatollahs, the only one calling openly for the overthrow of the regime, was Khomeini.

Khomeini's views have the advantage of great simplicity. He is not the most profound of present-day Shi'ite theologians, and in his propaganda he concentrates on a few essentials. On land reform he has retreated from his position of total rejection and says now that he opposed it mainly because the Shah had only wanted to create a market for foreign countries, whereas his, Khomeini's, land reform, will be run according to Islamic law. He also claims that he does not oppose freedom for the Muslim woman but only wants to "restore her dignity," and to this end the veil must stay, women must disappear from public life, coeducation must cease, and Islamic law must prevail on all issues of women's status. The cinema and other evil places of entertainment will have to go.

Khomeini has reiterated his opposition to Communism (which "always stabs us in the back"). But on the other hand the Ayatollah surrounded himself in Paris with some curious advisers whose prime loyalty is certainly not to Allah and his prophets, and this inevitably raises the question who has been manipulated by whom and what foreign power (or powers) have supported the Khomeini operation. Some of these questions are by now of historical interest, others are decisive as far as the struggle for power in Iran is concerned. In the wake of the fallout of the anti-Shah coalition, we shall certainly learn more about these machinations which at the moment are still shrouded in some mystery.

Khomeini's ideal is the creation of an Islamic republic ("our only basis of reference is the time of the Prophet and Imam Ali"); if pressed hard, he will point to the changes carried out in Pakistan after Bhutto's fall as the closest to his ideal society.\* As he declared in an interview with a German journalist:

Once Iran is independent it will also have freedom and social justice. Once the country is liberated from political and economic dependence on foreign powers, all the other causes of repression and exploitation will disappear and all citizens will be able freely to develop.

THIS is sheer demagoguery. It is only fair to add that other Shi'ite leaders have discussed the issues of fundamentalism and reform on a higher level of sophistication. According to the orthodox, the teachings of Islam are divine in origin and cannot be changed even according to the wishes of the majority. The reformers, on the other hand, of whom there are many, claim that Islam will not survive unless it adjusts itself to new conditions, although spokesmen of reform are frequently at a loss to provide answers to the new questions constantly arising. Fundamentalists and reformers are in broad agreement that Islam should be a third independent ("middle") way between capitalism and Communism. The social problem, they believe, will be solved if the faithful live up to the prescriptions of Islam—that is, if they are good and just and extend help to the needy. There is a remarkable, often textual, resemblance between these ideas and the social policies of the Christian churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which also rejected both liberal capitalism and socialism and advocated a "third way." But Islamic thinkers seem to be unaware of this; instead, they accuse the West of ignoring their important contribution to the development of social thought.

Such general sentiments are in any case of limited help in the management of contemporary societies. No more than other religions does Islam have clear political rules or economic formulas, although some leaders, including the Pakistani theologian Maududi and Colonel Qaddafi of Libya, have tried to codify various prescriptions in a rather arbitrary way. Islamic democracy as they envisage it should be based not on political parties, but on the "will of the people." The will of the people, they go on, should express itself through its clerical leaders (the ulema) or through "mass participation" such as instant popular acclaim as in tribal days. Libya is so far the only showcase where one can observe these techniques of establishing the popular will in practice.

The strongly religious character of the demonstrations against the Shah took most Western observers of the Iranian scene by surprise.† Spokes-

\* According to recent reports from Pakistan, the "Council of Islamic Ideology" has decided to abolish interest, limited liability, and incorporation. Religious taxes will be imposed. No more than a skeleton staff will be needed at the various ministries because the Pakistani economy will become an "economy of self-employment." Most judges will also become unemployed for "one severed limb can warn off more offenders than a thousand rotting away quietly in the jails" (*Guardian*, London, December 27, 1978).

† Robert Graham has nothing at all to say in his book about the role of the Shi'ite clergy, nor does it figure in Fred Halliday's long chapter on the opposition to the Shah; it is mentioned only in his epilogue written in late 1978. Soviet authors have, on the whole, devoted more attention to the political influence of the clergy; E. A. Doroshenko's *Shiitskoe Dukhovenstvo v Sovrennom Irane* ("The Shi'ite Clergy in Contemporary Iran") is the only full treatment of the subject in any foreign language.

men of the Iranian Left argue that the religious element should not be taken too seriously and that in any case the demands of the clergy are "objectively progressive." The organ of Iranian students in the U.S. has informed its readers that any attempt to portray the movement as religious is erroneous; all that it is willing to admit is that "there are Muslims in our movement," a fact that has never been in dispute. Communist and Trotskyite publications, and those of the New Left, have taken more or less the same line: Khomeini has had so many followers not because of his religion but because of his intransigent attitude toward the Shah.

But this is not convincing, for Khomeini was by no means the only consistent foe of the Shah. There were others, and some gave their lives in the process. Yet it was precisely the Ayatollah who became the hero of the masses, whereas the dead leaders of the armed resistance—the Jazanis, Farahanis, and Ahmad Zadehs—are all but forgotten. Furthermore, the Left has now had almost a year to organize more or less freely and to wrest the leadership of the mass movement from the hands of the clergy: Lenin had much less time in 1917. But far from succeeding, the Left has actually lost ground, even in the university.

During the first phases of the Iranian crisis most of the attacks were directed against the Shah and his party, and there were relatively few individual assaults (but many threats) against foreigners and minorities. But as tensions increase, the xenophobic element, never far from the surface, becomes more pronounced. The Bahais were the first butt of attack, but the Jews may not be far behind. Lord Curzon noted almost a century ago: "As soon as any outburst of bigotry takes place in Persia or elsewhere, the Jews are apt to be the first victims. Everyman's hand is then against them and woe betide the luckless Hebrew, who is the first to encounter a Persian street mob." Another foreign observer commenting on the revolution of 1906 wrote with some amusement about a Seyd from Shariz who most aptly epitomized the new idea of liberty: "In a fit of enthusiasm this worthy man raced down a street shouting 'Long Live Freedom,' punctuating his cries by sticking his knife into the scholars of a Jewish school" (David Fraser, *Persia and Turkey in Revolt*, London, 1910).

In sum, the mixture of religious and nationalist motives typical of Islam, even more typical of the Shi'ites, makes for a movement with considerable popular support, but it seems far-fetched to assume that it could be also a reformist or even liberalizing force.

#### IV

THE bazaar and the urban crowd connected with the bazaar—the merchants owning Teheran's 60,000 shops and their business

associates and relations in the other big cities—make up a political force equal in importance to the clergy and more powerful than the Left. It is a heterogeneous group, some being small shopowners while others are multimillionaires, but they have common interests. They have a closely knit organization based partly on family ties, and resembling a medieval guild. Their political orientation has varied; they were the backbone of the constitutional movement before World War I, but their general outlook has always been conservative, and their attitude to the Shah at best lukewarm. Furthermore, the bazaaris as a class have felt threatened by the appearance of department stores, the activities of multinational corporations, and other forms of modern business organization. For the bazaar has not been just a marketplace but a way of life—in the words of one historian, "the granary, the workshop, the bank, and the religious center of the whole society. It was there that the landowners sold their crops, craftsmen manufactured their wares, traders marketed their goods, those in need of money raised loans, and it was there that businessmen built and financed mosques and schools."\*

This economic, political, and cultural center has been threatened with extinction by modernization in the last two decades; hence the increasing dissatisfaction among the bazaaris. Resentment turned into active opposition when in 1975 some 10,000 inspectors were appointed by the government in yet another attempt to combat profiteering. Thousands of merchants were arrested, including some of the most substantial, and while the Shah failed to bring the prices down, he made new enemies, for it was at this stage that the bazaaris decided that the Shah must go. They increased their traditional support for the clergy, and passed the word to the thousands of professional and semi-professional crowd leaders who frequently act as officials of bona-fide or spurious athletic clubs.

These crowds are an important but underrated part of the Middle Eastern political scene, just as they were an important phenomenon in European capitals in the late 18th and 19th century. Karl Marx had harsh things to say in an article he wrote in 1853 for the *New York Tribune* about "the mob in the great cities of the Near East" which "in every important coup d'état has to be won over by bribes and flattery." More recently, an Iranian Marxist-Leninist, the late Bizhan Jazani, provided an analysis of what he calls the Teheran lumpenproletariat. He included "professional louts, tramps, and extortionists" (50,000), professional smugglers and pushers (50,000), and prostitutes; but also most bus conductors, and members of the cattle-slaughter trade and the vegetable and fruit trade, altogether several hun-

\* "The Crowd in Iranian Politics 1905-1953," by E. Abrahamian, *Past and Present*, 1968.

dreds of thousands. Jazani noted that this crowd has played an important part in all riots since the first revolution of 1906 and that its role has always been counterrevolutionary.\* Another Marxist author (E. Abrahamian) has provided a far more positive description of the crowd, attributing to it a high degree of political and class consciousness and noting that in Teheran, as in Paris and London, the main centers of radical activity are not the slums but the regions of industry, crafts, and trade.

Both these accounts are by now partly out of date, if only because the population of Teheran and the other big cities has increased so much in recent years. The population of Teheran alone has grown from 500,000 in 1939 to more than four million at the present time. The crowd thus contains slum dwellers, recent arrivals from the villages who follow the guidance of the neighborhood mullah, the lumpenproletariat, but also tens of thousands of students, and hundreds of thousands of boys in their teens for whom the demonstrations are simply the most exciting show in town. It is a heterogeneous and volatile mass, easy to mobilize against certain targets—such as foreigners—but difficult to array against others. It can be flattered and bought but it has also, within limits, a will of its own. Having asserted its power, it might not easily remove itself from the streets, and there is no saying against whom it will turn next.

## V

IRAN produced 276 million tons of oil in 1977, a little less than 10 per cent of the total world production. Even if the supply of Iranian oil should cease altogether, the results for the consumer overseas would not be catastrophic. Of the big oil companies, only British Petroleum obtains as much as 40 per cent of its supply from Iran. And since oil production will not stop for any length of time, the supply of the West does not seem to be in immediate danger; only the price of oil will go up. Nor is it at all likely that Iran will become in the foreseeable future a Soviet satellite like Afghanistan. The real threats are that the Iranian disarray (as well as the process of disintegration in Pakistan and Turkey) will spread to other Asian and African countries, and that Iran will need a long time to emerge from the present economic and political chaos. On the other hand, it is not unthinkable that precisely in view of the consequences of the crisis, Iran may act as a deterrent to crisis elsewhere.

It is a well-known fact that the more primitive a country the easier its recovery. Bangladesh, given up as a hopeless case only a few years ago, has made a spectacular and almost unnoticed recovery. But Iran is no longer a poor, agricultural country. Its per-capita income is \$2,400, almost four times

as high as in neighboring Turkey. The great majority of the population feels angry and frustrated about rising rents and food prices, about the inconveniences of big-city life, and about the general decline in the quality of life. But at the same time it takes for granted that it will at least maintain its present standard of living, and it expects the state to fulfill its material needs, to keep taxes low, to provide a high income and an almost complete welfare state.

Unfortunately, most of the new industries in Iran were working at a loss even before the unrest started, and one consequence is that the economy has now virtually collapsed. A British correspondent has provided a revealing account:

Workers of one Teheran factory, for example, first demanded a large wage increase. They got it and then asked for free transport to and from work. They got that and then asked for payment from the moment they left home to the moment they returned. Then they demanded free lunches and dinners. Finally they asked for one and a half hours off each afternoon for political lectures. The enterprise is now an economic nonsense and its unsalable products are piling up in the warehouse.

This state of affairs seems to be fairly typical, which means that the Iranian economy faces a difficult period of retrenchment and readjustment. Luckily there will be for years to come a life belt to prevent total disaster—the oil royalties.

There is no such life belt in Iranian politics. A great many scenarios for the future of Iran have been discussed. One, unfortunately, has to be ruled out from the beginning as next to impossible: the more or less smooth transition, as in Spain or Portugal or Greece, from dictatorship to democracy.

Iran has a long tradition of periods of great excitement followed by years of apathy, and it is possible that the present feverish activity will run its course and eventually give way to a new order. The first Persian revolution was followed by fifteen years of chaos and eventually by the dictatorship of the Shah's father. At that time, Iran was a far more backward country, and the great powers were preoccupied elsewhere, but then as now there was the ardent desire to abolish tyranny and to sweep away abuses, the belief that all that was wrong with Persia was the fault of one man and his retainers, and also the assumption that decent government would be established following the introduction of a new political system and new institutions.

But the sources of misgovernment go much deeper than this, and it is doubtful whether there has been any change in those basic attitudes in society without which a free political order cannot work. The political elites that acted for the over-

\* "The Socio-Economic Analysis of a Dependent Capitalist State" (first published in Iran in 1973).

throw of the Shah are not notable either for competence or for their attachment to democracy. The fact that there are conflicts of interest and differences in outlook among these elites may prevent for some time the emergence of a new autocracy, but this is more likely to result in anarchy than in freedom. In the final analysis, this is the Iranian tragedy, for which the Shah and his technocrats have to bear part of the responsibility: it should have been clear from the beginning that even complete success in economic development could not have provided an answer to Iran's political problems.

## VI

THE attitudes of the superpowers toward the Iranian crisis have been predictable. The Soviet Union has given massive support to the Tudeh party and also to other opposition groups. It has been said that the Soviet Union has a vested interest in a stable Iran, and that the establishment of an Islamic republic would have adverse effects on the Muslim republics of Central Asia. But while there is tension along nationalist lines in Soviet Central Asia, the power of organized religion has been broken there, and a religious "infection" seems unlikely; nor will Iran in a state of turmoil act as a political magnet for the Soviet Central Asian republics. On the contrary, seen from Moscow, a weak and unstable Iran must seem much the more preferable alternative—barring, that is, the installation of a pro-Soviet government, which is at present unlikely. At least a weak neighbor would be susceptible to pressure, and might gradually pass into the Soviet sphere of influence.

As for America, its inability to influence events in the Persian Gulf reflects its diminished stature in world affairs. Whether or not U.S. intelligence suffered a major setback by failing to read correctly the signs in Teheran is a side issue, except that it may be symptomatic of a general incompetence in the field of intelligence. The point about the Iranian crisis is that it is a typical détente conflict in which direct military involvement by the powers is ruled out, political propaganda plays a great part, and to the extent that there is any fighting, it is done by proxy. But the

initiative is all on one side; Soviet broadcasts and other media, after an initial period of restraint (or hesitation), were aggressively anti-Shah and anti-American, while the American media simply reflected the shilly-shallying in Washington. American interference by proxy was, of course, ruled out *a priori* as it has been in other recent cases.

As a result, the impression has been created in Asia and Africa, but also in Europe and above all in the Middle East, that while the Russians will take good care of their friends even if they are very exposed, the U.S. is neither able nor willing to do the same; that a power which cannot cope with the activities of a few hooligans in Beverly Hills cannot (and perhaps should not) influence the course of events in the Persian Gulf; that, in short, U.S. foreign policy has written off not only Iran but a far wider area, and that the countries concerned would be therefore well advised to come to terms with the Soviet Union as best they can. The Soviet media have relentlessly hammered away precisely at this point in recent weeks.

Such an appraisal may be exaggerated, but it is nevertheless very real and therefore dangerous; it may signal the beginning of a major realignment of forces throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It may also encourage the Russians to engage in a forward policy elsewhere, as the risks involved must now appear small or non-existent. For has not the Secretary of State himself declared that nothing could (or should?) be done in Iran, and has he not threatened to resign if U.S. foreign policy should become a little less accommodating?

But the decisive test is yet to come. To the extent that the Iranian crisis is a purely Iranian affair, nonintervention may have been the only possible policy for the U.S., and after all, American influence in the area may again increase. For any Iranian government of whatever complexion will have to look sooner or later to the United States to counterbalance Iran's powerful neighbor to the north. But this can only happen if the United States still exists as a political and military factor in the Middle East, and one which Russian policy must reckon with. And this, in turn, entirely depends on the political will of the makers of American foreign policy.