

# **LABOUR, SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE REFASHIONING OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY DISCOURSE IN THE INTERWAR IRAN**

**TOURAJ ATABAKI**

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL HISTORY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The end of the First World War in Iran was marked by the emergence of new political order, juxtaposed with new coercive institutions aimed at building a modern centralised state. The main task of the new state was to diminish provincial and tribal autonomy throughout the country and enhance the degree of interdependencies between the provinces. The new policy of centralizing government power was along with the implementation of widespread political and economic reforms that accelerated the process of urbanisation and industrialisation, all being underway since the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909). With the consolidation of such political development, there was also the refashioning of the civil right and civil society discourse, supported by non-coercive institutions such as political parties, press, guilds and labour unions, cultural associations and private schools; crafted a new identity for the Iranians, an autonomous status, now being the citizens of a modern nation-state, rather than subjects of an ancient empire. The arrival of urban labour movement in the country's public sphere manifested itself in organised and non-organised workers engaged in mass activities, not only calling for better working and living conditions, but also for the recognition of their civil rights by the modern state, the state that was expected to be accountable against the society at large.

Although in interwar period the society enjoyed a persistent development, the endurance and functionality of civil society's institutions were subjected to the degree of coercive measures adopted by the new state. While during the first half of this period, the political parties, labour unions and cultural associations sustained their activities in the major urban centres throughout the country; in the second half of this period, the accelerated coercive measures led the civil society's institutions into a dormant state. However, the cultural impact fashioned by these institutions during their functional life, added new dimensions to the civic culture that somehow lasted in the country and extended to the period followed. Indeed, as I argue in this paper, the outbreak of the labour movement in Iran during and after the Second World War - the largest labour movement in the Middle East - was partly imbedded in the labour movements of the interwar period.

It is the aim of the present study to revisit the emergence of social-democratic and labour movement in the interwar Iran and examine its contribution to the refashioning the discourse of civil right and civil society in the country.<sup>1</sup>

## PERSIAN GOING THROUGH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMATION

When the First World War came to an end, Iran was still entangled in post-Constitutional Revolution perplexity and turmoil resulted from the country being the battleground of the great powers of the day during the war. Since the early nineteenth century the Russians and British had maintained an important presence on the chessboard of Iranian national interests, however, following the Russian Revolutions of 1917, the presence of one of those powers, albeit temporarily, vanished. As the sole international player with power in Iran, the British soon, tried to subject Iran in a bilateral treaty of 1919, which endeavoured to bring Iran under a semi-colonial flag. But it was the resentment against this treaty known as Anglo-Iranian Treaty of 1919 that mobilized rank-and-file Iranians against the British and her supporter in the Persian political establishment. When, in 1921, a young journalist, Seyyed Zia Tabataba'i, in cooperation with a Cossack officer, Reza Khan, marched towards Teheran to launch their coup d'état, the first in Iranian history, they fashioned their act in such a way as to tap into popular resentment against the Anglo-Iranian Treaty, and the abrogation of the treaty became their first act.<sup>2</sup>

While the star of one of the coup's initiators, Seyyed Zia, was to shine for no more than three months before he fled into exile, the other actor, Reza Khan, not only remained in power but was destined to be recorded in Iranian history as the engineer of "modern Iran". After gradually consolidating his power and ascending to the peacock throne as the new king, Reza Pahlavi, during his twenty-year rule from 1921 to 1941, realized with stupendous consistency the demands voiced by his allies within enlightened circles. His policy of authoritarian modernization gradually changed Iran's traditional social as well as political setting. New institutions were founded, among them a national standing army based on a programme of universal male conscription and extensive reserve units; a sort of secular educational curriculum and a literacy programme for reading and writing in the dominant language, Persian; a reduction of linguistic differences; a new juridical system; and a national monetary system. Moreover, a centralization policy that included such harsh and disruptive measures as forced transfers and settlements of tens of thousands of pastoral tribes pursued to achieve greater national uniformity.

Reza Shah's policy of authoritarian modernization during the 1920s and 1930s with its motto "one country, one nation" sought to impose cultural unity on the country. As a result of the educational reforms, the traditional *maktab-khaneh* was transformed into the modern primary school, with the curriculum taught in Persian, now the national language of Iran. Concurrently, he imposed a new bill whereby he placed a ban on all "subversive" activities that would endanger the country's "national unity", including the promotion of *maram-e eshteraki* (the communist ideology).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, to achieve greater national uniformity Reza Shah later ordered the setting up of a government office called the *Sazeman Parvaresh Afkar* (the Department for Fostering Thought), with the task of directing and conditioning the younger generation towards serving the homeland.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the process of state-sponsored industrialization intensified the course of urbanization and altered the country's class orientation. By the end of the First World War, of the total 11.5 million population of Iran there were 2.5 million living in the cities. Twenty years later, just before the Second World War and with an increase in the total population of the country to 14.5 million, the population of Iranian cities had risen to 3.2 million.<sup>5</sup> Among the main reasons

for this change were the economic policies steadily adopted in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to increasing the manufacturing capacity of the country, the extensive urban investments by the government, which perceptibly overshadowed any rural development, caused labour migration from rural and tribal regions to the cities. For example, in the textile industry of Isfahan the majority of labour recruits were poor peasants of the sedentary population or the *'amaleh* from the Bakhtiyari nomadic tribe.<sup>6</sup>

The history of industrialization in interwar Iran can be divided into two periods: 1919 - 1931 and 1931-1941. In the first period the government facilitated private investment by introducing a series of new pieces of legislation. However, in the second period, 1930 -1941, partly owing to the effects of the Great Depression, the government adopted a series of protective policies that successfully endeavoured to shift the presence of private capital, while being more directly involved in investment as well as the management of the economic enterprises. As a result of the government's leaning towards centralization, the process of urbanization and industrialization now intensified, ending with a large number of modern industrial plants and an immediate increase in the labour force.

In the early 1920s there were only a few industrial plants that employed more than a hundred workers. Except for those in the oil industry in the south, these enterprises were located mainly in the northern provinces. Among them were an arsenal in Tehran, a sugar refinery in the suburb of Tehran, two textile mills in Tabriz and a match factory in Khoy. Over the next twenty years there was an average increase per annum in the share of industrial investments in the country's annual budget of about 25 per cent,<sup>7</sup> and the number of modern plants had reached 346 by the late 1930s.<sup>8</sup> After the oil industry, the long-existing cotton and wool-spinning and textile-producing industries were the second largest employment enterprises, with approximately 25,700 employees. Table 1 shows the growth of the labour force in selected large modern industries.

**TABLE ONE**  
**GROWTH OF THE LABOUR FORCE IN SELECTED LARGE MODERN INDUSTRIES PER SECTOR**

INDUSTRIES	EARLY 1920S	EARLY 1930S	LATE 1930S
Oil	7,000-8,000	17,000	31,000
Spinning and Textile	< 1500	1800	25,700
Leather Tannery	Not Available	Not Available	> 5000
Electricity Plants	100	200	600
Construction and Road	3,300	Not Available	60,000
Mining	200	Not Available	3,000
Railways	-	-	14,500
Car Transport	-	12,000	20,000
Carpet	Not available	Not Available	250,000

Source: Willem Floor, "Industrialisation in Iran 1900-194", Working Paper, University of Durham, Centre for the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1984), p. 29.

In the following pages I examine how these social and political changes in interwar Iran affected the living conditions of the rising working class in the country and increased working people's agency in shaping the social and political development of the country.

## THE EXPANSION OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

For the majority of the Iranian labouring poor, the end of the First World War was nothing but deterioration in their living conditions. Inflation and unemployment forced many to abandon their homes in search of sustenance in other parts of the country and even beyond its frontiers, although emigration to Russia was still little. The return of tens of thousands of Iranian migrant workers who had been employed in the industries, oilfields, mining and transport of the Caucasus following the October Revolution of 1917 added to the mounting army of unemployed labourers.<sup>9</sup> Nor did nature prove benevolent to the country's poor. The widespread famine of 1917-1918, brought about by successive seasonal droughts as well as the seizure of foodstuffs by occupying armies and the disruption of the country's transportation network caused by the war, made living conditions of the poor even more dreadful. In early February 1918 the growing hunger, now spreading all over the country, brought the poor into the streets to loot the bakeries and food stores. In Kermanshah, a city in the west of Iran, a confrontation between the hungry poor and the police ended with some casualties.<sup>10</sup>

The immediate reaction of the government was to adopt some charitable measures. Cooked rice was distributed among the poor in major cities. In the capital Tehran, the amount of rice dealt out reached 30 tonnes per day. But soon rice too was in short supply, which forced the government to bring to a halt this benevolent act. The immediate outcome of the ensuing colossal hunger and spread of disease such as typhus in the north and northwest of the country was a rise in the number of deaths in the country to thousands per day. Reports of the devastation all over the country were registered by the foreign diplomatic missions in the capital.<sup>11</sup>

The famine of 1917-1918 further led to a series of bread riots in the country's major cities, including the capital Tehran. The situation was "aggravated by hoarding and short-selling to the customers by bakers".<sup>12</sup> The actions of some bakers necessarily provoked the anger of Tehran's other labour sectors. As a result, in 1919 the printing-house workers, who had recently formed a union, staged a demonstration during which crowds attacked the capital's bakeries and granaries, and called on the government to increase rations, standardize the price of bread and regulate the supply and sales of such goods.

The Union of Printing Workers was the first union founded in the post-war era. Soon after its formation in 1919, the new union, with some 2,000 members, waged a fourteen-day strike with demands for the reduction of the working day to eight hours, regulation of overtime pay, the banning of arbitrary dismissals, and provision of medical care and compensation in the event of illness and injuries caused by industrial accidents. The full-blown success of the strike turned the printers' union into the vanguard of all other labour activist groups in post-First World War Iran.<sup>13</sup> During the strike, which turned into a nationwide strike, the workers of other sectors, such as bakeries, joined the printing workers and formed their own Union of Bakery Workers. Now the capital city of Tehran had two labour unions. The immediate achievements of these unions encouraged the workers of other sectors to wage a struggle for better working conditions and to fund their unions. In 1921 the number of unions in Tehran reached ten (Table Two).<sup>14</sup> However, whether these unions were comparable to modern unions or were just traditional guilds or else something in between, remains an open question.

**TABLE TWO**  
**MEMBERSHIP OF LABOUR UNIONS IN TEHRAN, 1921**

UNIONS	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
Bakery workers	3,000
Tailors	2,000
Shoemakers	1,800
Postal workers	90
Telegraph workers	180
Confectionary workers	300
Printers	180
Embroidery workers	150
Shop apprentices	350
Trading house clerks	250
-----	-----
Total	8,300

Source: Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, "Report to the International Red labour Union (Profintern)". *Historical Documents*, Vol. 6. (Florence: Mazdak, 1976), p. 105.

In an attempt to showcase their presence in the country's political arena and voice their demands, later the same year the founders of the Tehran-based unions joined together and formed the Central Council of All Labour Unions of Tehran (*Showra Markazi Koll Kargaran Tehran - CCLUT*).<sup>15</sup> This indeed was the first step towards the formation of a nationwide labour union, an event that took place a year later.

Concurrently, workers in other cities of Iran waged a struggle to form their own unions. In Rasht, with a labour force of 15,000, unions of printers and shoemakers with a total of 3,000 members were formed. In the Caspian city of Anzali the membership of the Union of Fishermen reached 3,000, while the Union of Dockworkers claimed to have 200 members.<sup>16</sup> In Tabriz the city's labour activists decided to call their union the Workers' Party (*Hezb Kargaran*). A key statute of the party held that membership was exclusively limited to "those whose life is not based on the exploitation of others".<sup>17</sup> In a city with a wage labour of 30,000, membership of the Workers' Party reached 3,000.<sup>18</sup> What is significant in this period is the lack of any type of labour organization in the oil fields of Khuzestan. In December 1920 some 2,000 Indian workers of the Abadan oil refinery waged a strike for higher wages and improvements in living conditions. The strike was soon joined by their Iranian co-workers, which forced the refinery authorities to accept some of the demands of the workers.<sup>19</sup>

The year 1922 began with a direct clash between the government and the unions. When in January 1922 the postal and telegraph workers waged a strike for a wage increase, the government promptly reacted and published a decree prohibiting civil servants from joining the unions. In reaction to this decree, and demanding back pay, the schoolteachers of Tehran also waged a strike. Such public-sector strikes brought the unions into direct confrontation with the government, and their action was soon coloured with a political flavour. In deep economic hardship, the government was unwilling to negotiate any increase of salaries, yet when the Parliament's printer employees held a strike for a pay increase, their demand was reluctantly accepted, with 10 days of paid vacation per year.

In 1922, with the confluence of the unions of Tehran with those from the provinces, the country's first nationwide labour union was founded. The new labour confederation was called the Central Council of Professional Labour Unions of Iran, (*Showra Markazi Ettahadiyah-ha Herfeh'i Kargaran Iran* - CCPLUI). Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, who in his previous career as a journalist had translated *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* into Persian,<sup>20</sup> was elected secretary of the country's new labour council. In 1922 the CCPLUI joined the Moscow-based Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern) and Dehgan attended its Fourth Congress held in Moscow. In his speech, he declared that the CCPLUI, with a membership of 20,000, had succeeded in organizing 20 per cent of the country's industrial labour force.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1922 was a period of labour unionism and activism. The workers' strikes for shorter working days and wage increases are well recorded. The dockworkers strikes in Anzali and the railway workers strikes in Tabriz were among these confrontations. The most important labour action in this period, however, was the strike held at the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in Abadan. The strike was begun on 14 March 1922 by Indian and Iranian workers, demanding higher pay. It did not last long; the reaction of the APOC was swift and harsh. All Iranian strikers were dismissed, while two ships repatriated some 2,000 Indian workers. Although the APOC management accused the Iranian communists of leading the strikes, there is no proof of such allegations. Indeed, it would be years before the Iranian communists could reach the APOC's territories in Khuzestan.<sup>22</sup>

By mid-1923 the repression of the labour unions was escalating and many labour activists were arrested and temporarily imprisoned. As a result, the leaders of the unions opted for semi-clandestine activities. These were just the preliminary anti-labour union steps taken by the government. Three years later, and following the inauguration of Reza Pahlavi as the new king in 1925, a large-scale campaign initiated by the government banned all union activities throughout the country. For the Iranian labour activists, there was no option but to go into total clandestinity.

In 1929, following two years of clandestine activities among the workers of the oil refinery of Abadan, a mass strike was concluded on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1929, on the occasion of the International Labour Day.<sup>23</sup> Among the demands of some 9,000 striking workers, out of a total workforce of 28,000, was a 15 per cent wage increase, recognition of the workers' union and of May Day as a legitimate holiday, and a call for shortening of the working day from ten hours to seven hours in the summer and eight hours in the winter.<sup>24</sup> However, APOC, in its report to London, described the demands of the striking workers as "six hours working days, minimum wage labourer Rials 45 per month, representation labour on the management, complete equality [between] Indians [and] Persians".<sup>25</sup> In their initial reaction, the authorities of APOC described the strike as a "Bolshevik plot" that aimed to set Khuzestan ablaze.<sup>26</sup> The management of the APOC interpreted the workers' demands as being "formulated to cloak real Bolshevik activity and not likely to materialise".<sup>27</sup> The strike continued for three days, and then it ended through "strong action by the [provincial] government of Abadan together with immediate reinforcement of British Military Intelligence Service garrison".<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the British "consul of Mohammerah [later Khoramshahr] requested the warship 'Cyclamen' to move down the Shatt al-Arab to point within easy reach of Abadan".<sup>29</sup>

Although the mass arrests of the strikers in the Abadan refinery and the deportation of 103 activists from the city<sup>30</sup> alleviated the confrontation between the workers and the APOC

management, the confrontation nevertheless extended to other areas of the oil industry such as the oilfield of Masjid Suleiman, even penetrating other industries in the region. According to a report despatched from Abadan to the London office of APOC, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1929 some 300 workers of the Ulen Company of the railway construction in the vicinity of Ahwaz “had demanded higher wages”.<sup>31</sup> Once more, and now on the advice of the APOC, the Ulen Company petitioned the governor-general of Ahwaz to arrest the strikers’ “ringleaders”.<sup>32</sup>

Following the unsuccessful strike at the Abadan refinery, the covert activities of the labour activists resulted on another mass strike. This strike was in Isfahan, known as the home city of the country’s textile industry, the Iranian Manchester. In May 1931 the workers of the *Vatan* state-owned textile factory in Isfahan launched a strike calling for improvements in working and living conditions. “The strike was almost total, and even 8 year old children participated. A few workers of the weaving department, who wanted to continue to work, were induced to strike as well.”<sup>33</sup> Marching towards the city centre, the workers articulated their demands, including:

- Change from piecework to a monthly salary;
- Eight-hour working day with sufficient pay, which should not be less than 5 *qiran*;
- Leisure time for half a day per week with pay;
- Maximum working day not to exceed ten hours, i.e. to include a maximum of two hours of overtime.

Following a police attack on the marchers, and the arrest of a number of the strike’s leaders, the workers returned to work the next day; however, they stopped work after eight hours as planned. More police harassment could not induce the workers to give up their demands. Finally, following some intense negotiations between the representatives of the government, the director of the factory, and the representatives of the workers, the government backed off and reached an agreement with the workers, accepting most of their demands, including the working day regulation under the terms that the workday would be reduced from twelve to nine hours and the lunch break increased from half an hour to one hour. Throughout the 1930s the Isfahan textile workers’ achievement in rectifying the working day regulations remained a benchmark not only for Iranian workers who wished to fix their working days, but also for the government in introducing new legislation regulating employers’ and employees’ associations.

The Isfahan textile strike was the last in the chain of labour strikes in interwar Iran. The gradual decline of labour activism in the 1930s was not simply due to the repressive political measures adopted by the new regime. The state-sponsored economic reforms mainly aimed to industrialize the country’s economy, which led to a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers. In the 1930s the Iranian Parliament ratified a number of other decrees, all covering diverse aspects related to improving the working conditions of workers and government employees. These decrees included the Factory Act of 1936, which comprised the organization of miscellaneous training projects and the improvement of working conditions, housing, health and nutrition, the 1937 Act on the employment of prisoners in industrial and agricultural sectors; and the 1939 Act regarding the working conditions of medical personnel in government service. The introduction of these decrees, albeit easy to trace in published or unpublished documents, does not provide an accurate picture of the extent to which labour discipline improved working and

living conditions. Moreover, to what extent these disciplines were internalized by the workers remains an unexplored area in the social history of interwar Iran.

### **SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND LABOUR MOVEMENT FOR THE REFASHIONING OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY DISCOURSE**

Developing since the mid-nineteenth century, the movement for Social progress, modernism and ultimately constitutionalism in Iran, after fifty years of assiduous endeavour, ultimately embodied in the country's constitutional code, of 1906-1907 and 1909. As an anti-absolutist revolution, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution was not only for *civil right*, but also for the protection of the *rights of the nation*. The revolution "was concerned not primarily with empowering the individual (in the sense implied by the notion of liberty), but with placing limits on the arbitrary exercise of state authority and specially on the arbitrary application of law – thus demanding a unified legal system." However, "the empowerment of the individual was interpreted in terms of checking the arbitrary powers of the state rather than giving priority to individual autonomy and human agency."<sup>34</sup> It was indeed in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution and during the parliamentary debates when the discourse of civil society, with direct reference to the so-called "intermediary institutions" such as citizen advocacy organizations, political parties and professional associations were introduced. Outside the parliament, it was the printed media, associated with the parties with the socialist tendencies that burdened the tasks of expanding the civil society discourse in public sphere. Among the pioneers was the *Iran-e Now* (New Iran), the daily organ of the Democrat Party of Iran (*Hezb Demokrat Iran*) published in Tehran during 1909-1911. Under the chief editorship of Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh (1884-1954)<sup>35</sup>, *Iran-e Now* was the most flourished periodical published at the time in Iran.<sup>36</sup> In addition to *Iran-e Now*, the Democrat Party of Iran in its various publications persistently advocated the position of citizenship and the rights of individual within the larger concept of constitutionalism.

The foundation of political parties in Iran dates back to a few years, prior to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909), however, it was during the second parliamentary term (November 1909 - December 1911), when the political parties, representing different fractions of the country's steadily emerging mass politics were born. The first political party instigated its activities in the Second Parliament was the Democrat Party of Iran. Shaped along with an unequivocal social democracy platform, the Democrat Party of Iran was indeed the descendant of a small Social Democratic Party (*Ejtema'iyun-'Amiyun*) founded in early 1900. With some association to the Second International of Socialist and Labour Parties (1889-1916), the Iranian *Ejtema'iyun-'Amiyun* took parts in Constitutional Revolution and later instituted the Democrat Party of Iran and persuaded its activities in the Parliament.<sup>37</sup>

In its program, the Democrat Party of Iran stated its commitment to defend the civil rights of the Iranian people in the following words:

- Equality of all individuals against the state and law with no race, religion or ethnic discrimination,
- Protection of all individual from any insult,

- Freedom of speech, press, assemblies and strikes,
- Freedom of residence and the right to travel.<sup>38</sup>

With such commitment to the rule of law, individual rights and individual autonomy, the Iranian social democrats persuaded their perception of the equality of all individuals beyond the gender deference. Their reference to individuals was inclusive, although not explicit, included man and woman. In the bylaw for joining the party too, they underlined such commitment in the following words:

For joining the party's cell, the candidate should accept the program and the bylaw of the party. Furthermore, two members of the party should endorse the application of the candidate. The candidate should enjoy the ingenuous reputation, not being scrounger or cleric.<sup>39</sup>

The political development in Russia had an excessive impact on social democracy and labour movement, worldwide. The call for establishing a more egalitarian society added new dimensions to the discourse of civil liberty and political democracy. Among the political parties in Iran that persuaded to craft a more explicit definition of liberty was the Socialist Party of Iran (*Ferqeh Sossiyalist Iran*).<sup>40</sup> The program of the Socialist Party comprises the following articles:

- Equality of all Iranians, male and female, irrespective of religious affiliation, race or ethnicity against law,
- Freedom of conscious, speech, press, assembly and strike,
- Liberty for women,
- Abolition of capital punishment.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to other social democratic parties' programs published earlier, the Socialist Party's program undeniably offered a more explicit depiction of civil right, especially when it referred to the gender equality. Furthermore, the program extended the frontiers of individual rights and liberty beyond the political boundaries and added new dimension to the discourse of civil and individual rights.<sup>42</sup>

However, it was with the publication of *Haqiqat* (Truth) that we note the labour movement touches the wide-ranging civil society discourse in post Constitutional Revolution Iran. Following its earlier organizational success, the Central Council of All Labour Unions of Tehran launched the publication of a nationwide newspaper. On 30 December 1921 the first issue of *Haqiqat* was published, with the socialist Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan as its chief editor. Some months later, the *Haqiqat* promoted itself as the official organ of the new labour confederation, the Central Council of Professional Labour Unions of Iran. With an unambiguously socialist orientation, the paper adopted the proverbial slogan of *Ranjbar Ruy Zamin Ettihad!* (Toilers of the World Unite!). This appeared on top of the first page, and the paper declared itself the "supporter of workers and labour unions".<sup>43</sup> Sultanzadeh, the renowned theoretician of the Communist Party of Iran (CPI) and an active member of the Comintern, in an article on the Iranian press, also argues that *Haqiqat*, with a circulation of 2,000-2,500, was the "true adherent of Iranian workers and peasants and their class struggle", yet he never claims that the publication was the official paper of the CPI.<sup>44</sup>

The first issue of Haqiqat carries an editorial where the paper assigned its task as to fight for hosting a new agency in the country's political stage. With a reference that "from today, the word *kar* (Work) should be juxtaposed with the words *sarmayeh* (capital) and *servat* (wealth)", Haqiqat calls the workers (*kargaran*) and the toilers (*ranjbaran*) to join the other social forces for enlightening the people and promoting the notion of social justice in politics in public life:

We don't take bread from anyone. We serve all Iranians, even those who consider us as their enemy. We want happiness and prosperity for all!<sup>45</sup>

In the following issues, Haqiqat persuaded its mission to educate the labour about the civil rights, in its individual or collective forms. The equalities for access to education, the right to work, the right for joining the professional organisation – labour unions, right to strike and above all, the gender equality were amongst the civil rights that Haqiqat propagated in its pages.

Everybody is accountable for its own action. Nobody has privilege against the other. Farmer, worker, writer, teacher soldier and minister or parliament deputy are all equal against the law and all enjoy the right for a dignified life.<sup>46</sup>

In an editorial under the title of "the guardian of liberty is the duty of the nation" (*hefz azadi, vazifeh mellat ast*), Haqiqat calls for the freedom of expression, press, assembly and associations:

We need not only the restoration of the constitutional code and free election for the parliament, but also we need to inaugurate provincial assemblies and the city councils where the representatives of the people can debate and decide about their welfare and prosperity.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, with reference to civil liberty, including practicing religion, it calls the religious establishment to sidestep from interfering in the private life of the people:

Everybody is accountable to its deeds. The government is not to interfere in the people's private life. Let people being accountable to their god as the wish.<sup>48</sup>

It is noteworthy that, the first reference to anti-clericalism in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution was by *Sur-Israfil* (1907-1908), a periodical with the social democracy inclination. *Sur-Israfil* called on the Iranian clergies to stop mingling with the every day life of the Iranians and let them to outline their future in the following terms:

The only demand to put forward to the spiritual and worldly leaders is the following: it is no longer necessary to introduce to us the promising ideal through a blow of stick or hard work of reasoning or else the lashes of preaching. You just permit us to discern and distinguish our ideal through our own personal autonomy.<sup>49</sup>

However, the Haqiqat's position on the institution of the religion in the country had been crafted more along its political stand. For Haqiqat, the Iranian clergies who were nothing but the "puppet

in the hands of reactionaries” could be classified in two groups: those who are “religion dealer” (*din foroush*), who don’t have any “legitimate profession” (*kasb va san‘at mashru‘*) than being *mulla*. The second group are those wealthy mullas who enjoy an aristocratic life:

The clerics of the first category need money and they turn to anyone who pays them more. They sit on any table that offers them more delicious food and they praise anyone who offers them more. The second group are those aristocrat mullas who threaten the people from any change and development in the country. Since establishing law and justice in the country, they threaten their very entities.<sup>50</sup>

Haqiqat compares the position of the Iranian clerics with the clerics in France and Ottoman Empire, when they aligned with the ancient regime and Ottoman despotism: “In the Ottoman Empire they often called ‘we need sharia’ (*shariat isteriz - shariat mikhahim*) and contributing in the killings of tens of thousands of innocent Muslims”. Such practice by the Ottoman clerics left no option there for the people than to annihilate the Ottoman clerics and emancipate the people from these “insidious germs” (*mikrob-hay muzi*).<sup>51</sup>

The Haqiqat’s anti-clericalism continued in the following issues, but with tangible references. For example by the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, in an editorial “Ramadan finished” Haqiqat bitterly criticise the mullas for abusing this holy month for preaching people against those groups and forces in the country who are for “freedom and justice” (*azadi va ‘edalat*).

It is not our policy to talk about people’s faith. We consider religion belonging to private life of our people and called the government not to interfere in this realm. It is not the government mission to ban people from eating in public or listening to music. ... We are happy that the holy month came to the end and there is no excuse for the mullas to attack the freedom lover in this country in the context of anti-religion.<sup>52</sup>

For Haqiqat the government’s stand on change and reform was ambiguous. While claiming to peruse radical change in favour of founding a modern state, it did not hesitate to pay lip service to the conservative clergies who asserted that any change in the state-society relationship in Iran, ultimately jeopardises the supremacy of the clerical establishment in the country. Next to the conservative clergies, there were also some secular political tendencies who were more pre-occupied with the practicing modernity from above by a modern, centralized and authoritative (though not necessarily despotic) state. Concerned with the fate that had befallen the Austria-Hungarian, the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, the adherents of this camp opted for the advent of a *man of order* who could sustain the country’s sovereignty and national unity, while introducing widespread social and political reform throughout the country. Haqiqat indubitably did not belong to this camp. On rejection of the authoritarian modernisation Haqiqat argued that:

Concerning the need for revolution or reform, there are two trends of thoughts among the liberal press published in the capital. While for some the prominence goes to the need of a powerful man of order to introduce

change and reform in Iran, there are others who are for the reform practiced by the society. Our respectable readers realise that we belong to this camp.<sup>53</sup>

With such introduction, Haqiqat proposes practical steps to observe the public contribution on practicing modernity and internalising the modernisation:

The peoples should be contributed in legislating laws and practicing it, through parliament, provincial and city councils. These are the best platform for the people to have their representatives to debate, criticise each other and finally come to a social and political consensus. The contribution of civil institution in shaping the political culture is equally important. Here the people from professional could gather and while sharing their experiences they make their own future. But we are aware those who do not believe for the power of the people cannot share our idea.<sup>54</sup>

As the paper of the labour union, Haqiqat's endorsement of the peoples rights and their vibrant presence in the public politics largely and primarily address the Iranian workers and labouring poor. On the occasion of the International Labour Day, First of May, 1922, Haqiqat in a long editorial elaborated its stand not only against the government but also on its short and long term policies towards labour movement.<sup>55</sup> Following a short review of the history of the International Labour Day, Haqiqat urged the government to lift the martial law and recognise the day as public holiday:

This is our proposal, an offer by those who stand against despotism and tribal lords and chieftains. Making First of May as public holiday is not an endorsement for chaos in the country. It is not an icon of revolution either. This is a day for the working people to proclaim their rights. This is a day to show to the government that it should serve the people and not otherwise.<sup>56</sup>

On the occasion of the International Labour Day, while Haqiqat displays its long-term desire to see the practice of socialism in the country, nevertheless, it admits that:

Today Iran is not ready for the abolition of private ownership. Simply because there is no wealth in the country being allocated to public ownership. We need first to harvest wealth here. This does not contradict the principle of socialism.<sup>57</sup>

For Haqiqat, the path towards generating wealth in the country went through the practice of modernity, where with a "strong and centralised national state" the society could "modernise its administration, education, ethics and even dress and food". In such society the workers had to be engaged in working process every minute of their working day and since "taking off from the working day is a sin", only "after the working hours the workers could gather and discuss politics".<sup>58</sup> Haqiqat's editorial for the First of May ends with:

Long live Constitutional Code, long live justice and equality, long live a civilised and modern Iran, long live a young Iran, long live May 1<sup>st</sup> and world's oppressed people's rights and long live freedom.<sup>59</sup>

With the consolidation of political power in the country, aiming to establish an authoritarian rule, the space for free and permissible political life steadily was narrowed. Finally, after 106<sup>th</sup> issue, the publication of Haqiqat was suspended in November 1922 by the government. The closure of Haqiqat turned out to be a follow-up to earlier attempts by the Iranian government to hinder the activities of labour unions. A practice continued, surely with some degree of fluctuation, in the remaining of the interwar period.

## CONCLUSION

The movement for constitutionalism in Iran led its main mission as to end the practice of arbitrary rule by aiming to establish a type of modern state crafted along the rule of law. This modern state was to be accountable to the society at large. However, the Iranian constitutionalists soon realised that their initiated modern state, did not habitually recognise the civil rights of the individual. Following the Constitutional Revolution, it was the parliament that debated this recognition and came out with a new supplementary to the Constitutional Code. The debate, however, was not confined within the walls of the parliament and soon, the press, political parties and professional organisations contributed to refashioning the notion of civil rights and the development of civil society to ensure its practices. The contribution of the labour and social democracy to this accomplishment was one of the aims of this article.

By studying the programmes of the social democratic parties and the journals associated to the labour unions, this article also challenged the metanarrative of the structuralist modernist school that confines the agency of advocating modernity and practicing the arduous task of modernising society to the audacious authoritative state. For the adherents of this school, the role of society was nothing than hindering the modernisation process through negation, alienation and protest whenever possible.

And finally what remains to be addressed is the question of actual audience. How far the views posted in the press associated to the social democratic parties and labour unions were representative of Iranian urban wage labours? There may not be an adequate response to this query as of now. However, there are traces of outlooks offered by the labour in their interwar activism that confirm the reception of views posted in such press. Furthermore, when one examines the labour movement during the Second World War and after in Iran, the impact of the interwar refashioned discourse of civil rights and civil society by the labour and social democratic movements is more discernible. Yet this is the subject of another study.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to extend my gratitude to Naser Mohajer, ..... for their comments in preparing this study.
- <sup>2</sup> For a detail study of Iranian perceptions of the 1919 Treaty, see: Homa Katouzian, *State and society in Iran. The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London: IB Tauris, 2006) pp. 88-116.
- <sup>3</sup> For some notes on the anti-communist legislation see: Morteza Ravandi, *Tafsir Qanun Assasi Iran* (Tehran: n.p., 1944) pp. 56-57. For the full text of the legislation see: <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92248>
- <sup>4</sup> Hossein Makki, *Tarikh Bist Saleh Iran* (Tehran: Nasher, 1983), pp. 412-13.
- <sup>5</sup> Willem Floor, *Industrialisation in Iran 1900-194* (Durham: University of Durham Press, 1984), p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> In the social structure of the Bakhtiyari nomadic tribe, the layer of *amaleh* in its singular form and *amalehjat* in the plural form consisted of those individual nomads whose function was meeting the logistical needs of the migrating tribe. They were *amal konandeh* or the functionaries of the nomads. Guarding the nomads against foreign incursion, and organising persistent raids against mainly the sedentary population were amongst their major task. For a detailed study of the Bakhtiyari *amaleh* and their position as the labour force in the Iranian emerging industry of the twentieth century see Atabaki, "From 'Amaleh (Labour) to Karagar (Worker): The Making of Working Class in the Iranian Oil Industry" (forthcoming).
- <sup>7</sup> Manuchehr Zia'i, *Majmueh Qavanin Vezerat Kar* (Budgetary Amendments Collection) (Tehran: Vezerat Barnameh va Budgeh, 1976)
- <sup>8</sup> Ministry of Labour, *Amar Sanay' Iran* (Industrial Statistic of Iran) (Tehran: Entesharat Vezerat Kar, 1948).
- <sup>9</sup> For a study of the Iranian migrant labours in the Caucasus see: Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subaltern on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire", *International Review of Social History*, 48:3 (2003) pp.401-426.
- <sup>10</sup> Reference needed
- <sup>11</sup> Report from the U.S. legation in Tehran, November 1, 1918, USNA 891.00/1072.
- <sup>12</sup> Willem Floor, *Labour Unions....*, p. 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984) p. 7. Willem Floor, *Labour Unions, Law and Conditions in Iran (1900-1941)*, (Durham: University of Durham Press, 1985), p. 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Touraj Atabaki, "L'Organisation Syndicale Ouvrière en Iran", *Sou'al*, 8 (1987) pp. 36-37.
- <sup>15</sup> Ardashes Avanesian, *Safehati Chand az Jonbesh Kargari va Komonisti Iran dar Dowran Avaal Reza Shah* (Leipzig: Tudeh Publication, 1979), p. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, "Report to Profintern". *Historical Documents*, Vol. 6 (Florence: Mazdak, 1976), p. 106. The figures in this report cannot be crosschecked with the other sources, thus should be approached with some degree of prudence.
- <sup>17</sup> Abdolhosseyn Agahi, "60 Sal az Tarikh Tasis Hezb Komonist Iran Gozasht", *Donya*, 4(3), 1960.
- <sup>18</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, op.cit. p. 106.
- <sup>19</sup> In 1920 they were ... out of ...
- <sup>20</sup> Shokrolah Mani, *Tairikhcheh Nehzath Karigari dar Iran* (Tehran: Taban, 1946), p. 14.
- <sup>21</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, op.cit. No other available sources confirm Dehgan's claim.
- <sup>22</sup> British National Archive, FO 371/7836 Intelligence Summary Persian Gulf, March 23 1922. In 1922 of the total 26,256 employees of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the Indian staff and labour comprised 4,285 and the Persian 18,441. See R.W. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum, Vol. 1* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 401.
- <sup>23</sup> For recent studies of the workers' strike in the oil industry in 1929 see: Kaveh Bayat, "With or Without Workers in Reza Shah's Iran", in Touraj Atabaki, *The State and the Subaltern. Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 2007) pp. 111-122; Stephanie Cronin, *Gendering the Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry: The Role of Women in the 1929 Abadan Refinery Strike*. Unpublished paper.
- <sup>24</sup> Ardeshir Avanesian, *Safahati chand az Jonbesh Karigari va Komonisti da Dowran Avval Saltanat Reza Shah (1922-1933)*, op.cit. pp. 75-83. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil*, pp. 68-69.
- <sup>25</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Abadan to London, Telegram 6 May 1929.
- <sup>26</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Abadan to London, Telegram 4 May 1929.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Abadan to Tehran, Telegram 12 May 1929.

- <sup>29</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Secret Report, 8 May 1929. Yusuf Efekhari, *Khatirat Dowran Separi-shodeh, 1299-1329*, Kaveh Bayat and Majid Tafreshi (eds) (Tehran: Ferdows, 1991) p. 39.
- <sup>30</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Secret Report, 17 May 1929.
- <sup>31</sup> British Petroleum Archive, ARC59010. Secret Report, 2 June 1929. Ulen Company was a railway construction company functioning in the vicinity of Ahwaz.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Willem Floor, *Labour Unions*, p. 54.
- <sup>34</sup> Ali Gheissari, "Constitutional rights and the Development of Civil Law in Iran, 1907-1941", in H.E. Chehabi and Vanessa Martin (eds.), *Iran's Constitutional Revolution, Polpular Politics, Cultureal Transformations and Transnational Connections* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010) p. 72 and 422.
- <sup>35</sup> Ferydun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasy-e Ejtema'i dar Nahzat-e Mashrutiyat-e Iran* (Tehran: Payam, 1976), pp. 96-97.
- <sup>36</sup> Edward G. Browne, *Press and Poetry*, p. 52.
- <sup>37</sup> For the history of early Social democrat organisations see Abdolhossein Agahi, "Piramun nakhostin ashna'i-ye Iranian ba Marxism," *Donya* 3 (1962).
- <sup>38</sup> "The Program of Democrat Party of Iran" (*Maramnameh Ferqeh Siyasi Demokrat Iran*) in Mansoureh Etehadiyyeh (ed), *Maramnameh va Nezamnameh-hay Ahzab Siyasi Iran dar Dovomin Dowreh Majle Shoray Melli* (Tehran: Nashr Tarikh Iran, 1982), p. 6.
- <sup>39</sup> "The Bylaw of the Democrat Party of Iran" (*Qava'ed va Nezamnameh Ferqeh Dmokrat Iran*) in Mansoureh Etehadiyyeh (ed), op.cit. p. 12.
- <sup>40</sup> For an abridge history of the Socialist Party of Iran, see: Malak al-Sho'ara Bahar, *Tarikh Mokhtasr Ahzab Siyasi Iran – Third edition* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1957), pp. 130-135.
- <sup>41</sup> Malak al-Sho'ara Bahar, *Tarikh Mokhtasar Ahzab Siyasi Iran* (Tehran: Amirkabir, 1978), p. 130.
- <sup>42</sup> What do we know of their social base and the extent of their relation with workers and labourers
- <sup>43</sup> Haqiqat, as some have argued never was the official organ of the Communist Party of Iran (CPI), despite the contribution of a prominent member of the CPI, Pishevari, whose involvement in the publication is often misinterpreted as fashioning Haqiqat as the official organ of the Communist Party of Iran. For such argument see: *Salname Hezb Tudeh Iran* (Leipzig: Tudeh Publication, 1970), pp. 176-177.
- <sup>44</sup> *Historical Documents: The Workers, Social Democrats, and the Communist Movement in Iran (1903-1963)*, Volume VII (Florence: Mazdak 1978), p. 2.
- <sup>45</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 1, 30 December 1921.
- <sup>46</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 58, 12 April 1922. Persian language is not gendered. The third personal pronoun could be he or she. To avoid any anachronistic confusion, I have adopted "it" to observe neutrality.
- <sup>47</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 49, 29 March 1922.
- <sup>48</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 70, 1 May 1922.
- <sup>49</sup> *Sur-e Israfil*, no. 12, 5 September 1907.
- <sup>50</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 60, 16 April 1922.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 86, 29 May 1922.
- <sup>53</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 72, 5 May 1922.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> *Haqiqat*, no. 68, 28 April 1922.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.