Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol.1, No.3
Publication Date: May 15, 2014
DOI: 10.14738/assrj.13.134

Khandagh, N. (2014). Trade Unions and The Tudeh (mass) Party Iran, *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal, 1*(3), 64-72

Trade Unions and the Tudeh (mass) Party Iran

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ABSTRACT

The Tudeh worked widely amongst the working classes to awaken their class consciousness, encouraging them to fight for their rights by establishing a trade union movement, and urging them to support the Tudeh as the only party concerned for their welfare. Their party platform indeed makes clear how deeply committed to the workers' cause the Tudeh party actually was, a point illustrated particularly by their concern for female workers, an especially vulnerable group. The fragmentary nature of cottage industry in Iran was harmful to the workers conditions so the Tudeh believed, and they accordingly encouraged the formation of unions, to remove the need for exploiting middlemen between the workers and consumers, giving the employees themselves more control over their work situation [25].

Keywords: Tudeh Party, Trade Unions, workers, welfare, conditions, industrial.

INTRODUCTION

The fragmentary activity of both Trade Union and Communist groups (Muhammad Sahimi, 28 jun 2011) during the first two decades of the twentieth century was eventually co-ordinated and organized into the central Council of Federated Trade Unions in 1921. He Council produced its own newspaper called Haqiqat (Truth) and restructured the regional unions of small groups – such as textile and oil workers, as well as arranging demonstrations and strikes. The unions mainly represented small, less-developed trades only 6 unions out of 32 were in progressive industry. Riza Shah ruthlessly suppressed all of the unions' activities in 1926 (5 of their leaders died in prison), but his economic measures which included road construction, the building of railways which included road construction, the building of railways, ports and factories, acted as a spur to the remnant of the movement, since these modernized methods increased the industrial labour force fifty-fold.

The growth of the prolentariat was also assisted by the 50% expansion of the oil-related work-force and the amalgamation of small workshops to form larger units; by 1941 hereby industry alone employed 170,0o0 workers. The conditions, under which they labored, however, were appalling, resembling slave labour. With no organized unions, workers' reaction was very disjointed and most often on a spontaneous basis. For example, a strike called at the Abadan oil refinery to demand better conditions resulted not only in an agreed wage increase, but also drew a British gunboat and 500 arrests. This 'transitional' period was one that weakened union activity, since it meant the loss of a personal relationship between workers and employers, which led to the disappearance of moral responsibility on the part of the owners for the working people, while no substitute had been created to replace the old system.

Behind the movement however were leaders who truly believed in socialism – including Pishavary from its formal formation in 1941, the Tudeh encouraged the trade Unions which supported this movement. The Party was the political expression of the communist revival, set up by the Arani Circle (Zabih. S., 1966), who were ex-prisoners (Sepehr Zabih, 2011) , and its

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aims, under its opposition to colonial imperialism, were directed towards the restructuring of the political economy in a democratic form (Demonstrated of provisional statute).

Thus the Central Council of Trades Unions (E., Abrahimian, 2010) represented an attempt by experienced trade unionists together with Tehran workers to rebuild the unions. The labour-emphasis of the Party increased its support throughout Iran, especially in the textile-dominated areas around Isfahan, where much demand was made for improved wages and conditions. The Tudeh succeeded in transforming aggrieved workers into a considerable political force and during 1942-3, unionist tactics widened popular support, with each victory strengthening the movement's appeal.

Although the elections of 1943-4 left the Tudeh with only 8 out of 120 seats, efficient organization and unique backing from a mass political movement proved a great source of support. The Central Council of United Trades Unions (CCUTU) grew to 200,000 strong within a year and 400,000 by 1946 (Ibrahimian, E., 1941-53). The struggle became somewhat more bitter (Sykes, E., 1946) during the inflationary period in the four years to 21st march, 1945. Fifteen years before, a strike in the largest textile mill in Isfahan had ended with the imprisonment of the leaders, and in the Khuzistan oil fields, first affected in 1922, a general strike in 1929 had paralysed the industry, and five of its instigators were still in prison in 1941 (Ibrahimian, E., 1941, et al., Zabih. S., 1966) . This four year period saw Isfahan plagued with strikes and a lockout which drove starving workers into factories and granaries. The rising was quelled in July 1943 by Bakhtiyari and Qashqai tribesmen on government orders. The oil-fields avoided much of the trouble as the trades union movement respected the Allies' efforts against the Axis powers. The first activities of the underground movement were not until May 1946, despite its existence in Khuzistan for some length of time previously; the CCUTU had been or was a stabilising factor, an encouraging influence upon the war-effort and denouncing walk-outs and wage disputes. This spread to other regions as well, - especialy manufacturing plants in Tabriz (H. Ladjevardi, 1985), the textile and coal industries and railways in Gilan and Mazandaran, in Tehran's light industry, in the mills of Isfahan, Shiraz and Yazd, and in the Khuzistan oil fields (Dr. Stephanie Cronin – 2004, Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran.) . The unions in these centres, whose members numbered tens of thousands by 1946, also sponsored strikes as early as 1942, and in 1946 were supporting several genera strikes.

Contrary to Lenczowski's view (Lenczowski, G., 1949, p.234) that many misguided individuals realized the truth, when the Tudeh pressed home the Soviet position during the 1944 crisis in the oil industry, Ibrahimian offers opposing evidence, on Constitution Day, 1945, of 20 mass meeting. The one in Tehran alone drew 40,000 people in May 1946; 80,000 people marched in Abadan alone (London Times, July 16, 1946, et al., Jones, J., 1947); and in October 1946, 100,000 people celebrated 5 years of the Party's existence in Tehran, and American estimates set communist support at 40% (New York Times, June 15, 1946).

The march in Abadan ultimately led to a three-week strike, beginning in Agha Jari on May 14th. This was preceded by a strike on April 15th, during which the General Manager conceded the demand for the reinstatement of 7 workers made by the 2000 strikers and the plant manager had a change of attitude. At the same time, a wage demand for double pay was put forward at Gach Saran. The Tudeh's influence among the workers (public record office 1946, Aug. 10) was demonstrated in early June, when they organized to construct a barrier around Khorramshahr to prevent its submergence by foods. Although the oil company in Abadangave technical advance, they were unable to control the work-force as were the Tudeh, who commandeered company vehicles and regulate traffic, etc (public record office 1946). the workers at Agha Jari were agitating for improved housing as far back as 1938, and the strike in which 10,000 men

participated in May was in support of demands for medical facilities, the provision of midwives ice and drinking-water, special allowances, and Friday pay. The company, adopting a stiff attitude, called for military intervention (which was made available) on the grounds of the political nature of the demands, and the drastic step of cutting off the vital water supple. A government commission was able to persuade the company to settle, however, and in fact it (the company) paid the workers wages for duration of the strike: an unprecedented act which was nevertheless disguised as a beneficial payment ex gratia to its employees. His had the effect, naturally, of encouraging other workers to adopt similar action.

Isfahan at this time was a city of some significance, having alone escaped the two-pronged Allied invasion and having suffered various strikes earlier the same year. The workers in Isfahan came out in sympathy whit those striking at Agha Jari, and a procession estimated at 7000 ok place. A success here would clearly have been indigenous, i.e. free from Allied intervention. The Tudeh's influence in the mills and town advanced considerably with the appointment of a Tudeh supporter to the post of Governor-General. It was also affirmed by a series of shorter strikes - at an Ahwaz spinning factory on June 3rd, at the port of Bandar-i Shahpur on June 6th, and in the Abadan bazaar on June 11th, as well as such unionist backwaters as Bushahr. The union was in fact recognized as a result of the Itimadiyya mills strike of June 11-17th.

On July 8th came the alarming incident of a meeting of Ali Umid with 40 non-commissioned incident from the Ahwaz garrison, and on the 14th, the CCUTU demanded from the AIOC the recall of the Governor-General Khuzistan, Misbah Fatimi, the disarmament of the tribes, an end of the AIOC's interference in internal Iranian affairs, and wages for Fridays. With only an hour's notice, 22,000 men from the refinery alone 9excluding those in essential services) struck at 6.00am. it was a very well organized and peaceful affair. The strike-leaders, who effectively controlled Khurramshahr, commandeered transport and confined Europeans to their homes; committees for food, and security and propaganda were set up under a directing Committee. Meanwhile, martial law was declared and police and gendarmerie forces were reinforced. Telegrams were sent to the party heads of Tehran adding to the previous demands for better conditions of employment and living standards in general.

The reply was a promise that the Chief of Staff guaranteed no further military intervention (Ibid). At 5.00pm, local Arabs opposed to the strike cashed with demonstrators marching past the HQ of the Arab Union, and an Arab merchant who was a contractor for the AIOC was killed. The violence swelled, during which a second Arab contractor died (both bodies were mutilated (Skrine, k., 1962)), and shooting began, involving fire by troops, and lasted until late into the evening: in all a total of 25 people were killed, and 173 injured.

The Arabs had secret encouragement from local officials: it is known that a consultation with the Sheikhs was held on the 14th; the Governor-General considered arming them and the next day, suggested that the Arabs should set fire to the Tudeh HQ and assemble their tribesmen, who were already gathering. The left-wing Iranian press, with substantial Soviet press support, accused the Britain and the AIOC of conspiracy, although this was unlikely to have true.

The British Ambassador warned the Consul of Khurramshahr against interference with the Arabs, and suggested that similar advice be given to the AIOC (public record office 1946, July 14): the British were determined to give no grounds for accusations against them on such an account – on July 27, the Arabs against indeed claimed that the British had restrained them from acts of vengeance (public record office 1946, July 27), and on the 15th,counsellor Sir

Clarmont Skrine, in an investigation of the Indian artisans' grievances, also urged restraining of Arab retaliation on the Governor (public record office 1946, July 15); the latter, Major Fatih, was probably using the Arabs to pressurize the government. On Willoughby's arrival in Abadan, he warned that if Prince Muzaffar Firuz ordered the release of the Tudeh ringleaders, Arabs might retaliate with the murder of all Persians, regardless of whether they were members of the Tudeh or not, and this was born out by the war-like assembly of Arabs at the Governor's house. The central government was torn between a desire to carry out the British recommendation that it assert its authority, and its wish to avoid alienating the Soviet Union and much Iranian support by treating the Tudeh Party and Iranian nationals too harshly. They decided upon sending reinforcements to the Governor- General on July 15, together with a telegram ordering the arrest of Tudeh members, and the drawing up of a list of suspected agitators to be passed on to the government, who would either arrest or expel them from Khuzistan. Prime Minister Qavam instructed the Governor-General to use discretionary measures to prevent further disturbances. Misbah Fatimi remarked to Mr. Northcroft of the Company, that this was not the expected propitiation of the Tudeh, regardless of coat, but he was in fact proved wrong within a few days (public record office 1946, July 15). Firstly, a delegation which included Muzaffar Firuz on the Prime Minister's behalf, Radmanish, acting Minister of Commerce, and 3 Tudeh members, arrived on July 15. They inspected the damage, interviewed many of the wounded, and released some of the strike leaders. Firuz then called a meeting with the AIOC to discuss ways of ending the strike: this strange meeting took ace with the government delegation and AIOC leaders in one room, and five strike leaders with Iskandari and some others as mediators in another. The AIOC had made some minor concessions over pay of Friday wages, and by 1.00 am it was agreed that the strikes would end at dawn (Skrine, k., 1962, p.244). The AIOC resented the Tudeh's management of the issue, and wished to break the leaders of the Union, a move which, apart from being undiplomatic, would have helped neither the Company, nor the closely-linked British Government.

By this time, fear of the Arabs had killed the strike, and all that was being sought was the release of imprisoned Tudeh leaders, and extrication of the Party by attaching blame to the British and Arabs (Ibid). Firuz, according to Skrine, tried to persuade the AIOC that some concessions on their part would end the strike, for which they were partly responsible, claiming that he himself had ordered the end of the supposedly 'illegal' strike. Release of Tudeh leaders was useless, he said. In the meantime, however, he told Tudeh members elsewhere that the Prime Minister was indeed urging an end to the strike, promising release and assistance towards the defeat of Fatimi and Fatih, and in holding the British and Arabs responsible for the violence which had occurred, he also threatened them that they would be embarrassed, and the Party would collapse when he workers returned to work voluntarily.

That same night, Firuz also warned the Sheikhs of Khorramshahr from instigating further disturbances, and the next morning assured 30,000 workers in Abadan of Qavam's interest in their welfare, as well as the Company's good intentions. The work-force returned to work on July 17, with no damage to AIOC property or installation, and a week's production was the only thing lost. Qavam also received, at the same time, a congratulatory message from the British Foreign office, stating how successful had been the efforts of the Governor-General and the authorities in maintaining peace. The day following, the British Ambassador tried on the Government's behalf to stem the tide of representation arriving from Tehran, which threatened political stability (public record office 1946, July 18). Le Rougetel reported to the Foreign Office the anti-authoritarian and non-industrial nature of the strike, and Qavam's apparent inability to exercise governmental authority in Khuzistan, and enforce his will over Firuz and others – hence the situation was still 'incalculable' (Ibid). Le Rougetel recognized the undesirability of Firuz who was the main obstacle to any improvement: this was in accord with the US

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Ambassador, Allen, who warned against any hasty counter-productive action.

On July 23, Col. Zargami of the war Ministry, Turaj-Amin, and two officials from the Ministry of Justice, arrived to investigate the causes of the riots. According to Le Rougetel (public record office 1946, Oct. 20), this was a pro-Tudeh commission, who distorted the evidence (Azerbaijan crisis 1945-48, 2011) to show that the disorders were due to the British, and the AIOC, who were also responsible for organizing Arab resistance against the central government and the Tudeh Party.

The Tudeh were particularly popular with the Union movement at that time, and the British were consequently especially anxious to counteract their influence through the creation of an oil workers union (Elwell-Sutton, C.P., 1955). By July 14, the British were negotiating with the Tudeh, which nonetheless did not prevent the strike breaking out. Indeed, the major contributory factor for the strike was the party's fear that the British sought to destroy the CCUTU through repression, or incitement of the Arabs. When the strike ended, the Company had agreed to pay a minimum daily rate of 35 rials, including wages for the rest day (Friday). It was pointed out to the Prime Minister that this agreement, costing 1$ million per year to the company, was in violation of the Labour Law, which laid down that wages were to be fixed by the High Labour Council. British workers in the Company, as well as politicians and experts, complained that the Company was badly organized and needed strengthening and more discipline, and this call was taken up by the Britain Foreign Office. The Labour Cabinet was forced to choose between improving condition in order to stem Tudeh influence, and its ideology (David Sylvan, et al., Stephen Majeski, 2009), which of course, espoused the Union movement.

The British response also extended to the positing of two Navy ships to Abadan, off the Shatt, al-Arab, an act to which the Iranian government reacted with suspicion, declaring it to be an unfriendly act if it was connected with the strike, and the Iranian press was similarly hostile. Foreign Secretary Bevin considered the evacuation of British and Indian personnel, or alternatively occupation of the area to maintain continued production (Bevin, E., vol.11, .269). Plan were mooted to send Indian troops to Basra, within easy reach of Abadan, the present threat to the city being seen as more important than an Egyptian or Iraqi reaction. The risk was also considered to outweigh the possible of Soviet intervention. The move would be disguised under the pretext of the replacement of British troops awaiting repatriation. The troop dispatch was announced as a precautionary measure of protection for the AIOC, which gave rise to much concern within the Iranian government and press over the mention of protection of Arab lives, a reference probably inserted by the British to appease Iraq. Iranian demands for the removal of the troops were met with reassurances from the British that they had full confidence in the government's authority. Indeed, the presence of the Indian forces increased popular support and greater official influence in the area, as well as that of the Company and the Arabs. The discordant note between the Indian claim to have a safeguarding role, and the Foreign Office statement that they were replacement troops was in fact picked up by the State Department in Washington, who were afraid of a violation of the UN Charter. The action, according to Iran, was a threat to her security, the prestige of the government, and also a weakening influence on the UN. America forestalled an Iranian outcry in the Security Council, but avoided taking on the role of mediator with Britain (public record office 1946, Aug.13).

By this stage, the Tudeh was finding it necessary to convince its supporters through publications that it was not merely making political capital out of a communal antagonism, but that it in fact favoured the Arabs, and all provincial minorities (Zafar, July 30, 1946). Iraq was

entertaining hopes that Khuzistan might become part of Iraq, and this idea was formulated by the Arab League early in August. Antagonism toward the Tudeh in Khuzistan was primarily tribal, with the Sheikhs forming the tribally tight-knit Arab community into the Sad Party, in opposition to the Tudeh (Blake, K – 2009), whose appeal was principally to non-Arab wage earners. British relations with Iraq further strengthened her feelings of protectiveness towards the Arabs in Iran as well, so that the combination of all these factors encouraged the nationalist element of the Tudeh's attitude, with a strong anti-immigration polemic, and accusations against Khuzistan that it was seeking independence and of conspiracy between Britain and Iraq.

Whereas the British had previously turned to the Tudeh Party in the South, they now began to strengthen Qavam's position in order to prevent Soviet infiltration and hence the Tudeh's power (Milani, A, 2011). On June 29, Qavam formed the Democrat Party to contest the general election and defeat the Tudeh (Binder, L., (1964), p.206) and towards this end he enlisted the support of some former Tudeh organizers. When he invited the party to send a representative to the Cabinet they dispatched three of their best members – Iraj Iskandari, Faraydun Kishavarz, and Murtaza Yazdi. In spite of their hostility, the Tudeh supported Qavam (Bogle, L.L., 2001) in order to achieve three goals: one, to combat imperialism; two, to resolve their difference; and three, to increase the chances of democracy (Rahbar, Summer 1946). Much reform was initiated through the work of Iskandari as Minister of Economy, Kishavarz as Education Secretary and Yazdi in the Department of Health, and indeed, the coalition significantly strengthened Qavam. However, it is important to notice that Qavam's ulterior motive in inviting Tudeh co-operation was to undermine the Party's influence in the union movement as a means to control labour unrest.

A period of turbulence ensued following upon the end of the strike, including the suppression of the trades unions in the South by the British and the central government. The Tudeh's objections about this to Qavam fell on deaf ears as he was in fact one of its instigators. In hat ear, there were also disturbances in the Fars region in which many people were killed. Many party members, including the Tudeh, recommended to the government that it should crush the rebellion and maintain the integrity of Iran. The revolt seems to have been a plot between the British and Iranian governments, and when the central government concluded peace with the tribes and called it a 'patriotic revolution', the Tudeh was incensed. Due to this, and other reasons, an official split opened between the coalition: Qavam argued that the Democrat Party ought to have a body which would supervise the approaching general election, but it was clear that this was an idea designed to prevent the election of the Tudeh. In the ensuing break, the three Tudeh ministers refused to attend Parliament, and the coalition collapsed (Bayaniyya yi Kumita yi Markazi yi Hizbi Tuda, Summer 1946). Qavam's attitude towards the communist movement suddenly shifted, and all union activity – in particular the strike in Tehran on Nov. 12 – was stopped, and hundreds of union and party members were arrested throughout the country. The party press was disbanded, and none of the Tudeh's members were safe with the threat of prison and other oppressive measures hanging over them, while at the same time their freedom of meeting was restricted which virtually curtailed all their activities (Stephanie Cronin, 2004). There were several reason behind this policy: Firstly, the Tudeh had tried in the interval of some years after World War II to awaken the political awareness of Iranians with respect to their rights. The central government was naturally apprehensive of too much popular knowledge, since it would expose their repressive methods. Secondly, it knew that the Tudeh was almost sure to win the elections to the 15th Majlis, and so determined to discredit the Party's leadership, and warn the population against the dangers of a communist regime. It was not alone in this attitude, since other "imperialist" governments, like the British or America, were also anti-communist. Thirdly, Qavam needed to increase his personal

popularity, which was at a low ebb, and he thus justified his orders for mass arrests by claiming that he was protecting the country from such communist threats.

While Qavam's policy may have been effective in Tehran, it was still necessary to subdue the provinces. One example of the government's methods was the imposition of martial law in Mazandaran, where army and police officers were moved in, occupying all the towns en route from Tehran, and many people were arrested, tortured and killed (Shamshiri Imruz, Bayaniyya yi Kumita yi Markazi yi Hizbi Tuda, Autumn 1946). The excuse given was the country-wide one day railway strike.

The Tudeh's complaints reached the international Trades Unions' Federation through the channels of the press, and the Federation wrote in strong protest to the central government, advising them that this was an action in violation of their treaty with the Allied powers. The Iranian government, seeking to retain its prestige, invited a delegation from the Federation: the commission at once saw through the design of the government, and recognized the fact that the ruling Democrat Party (Limbert J. W. , 2009) had no popular base in Iran, since the workers supported the Trades Union movement and the Tudeh Party (Ibid).

Following the repression instigated by Qavam, the Tudeh went underground, although their electoral candidates, such as A. Qasimi in Gurgan, were arrested. In a press interview, Qavam, answering questions concerning the Party, said that the Tudeh was frightened of the common people, who did not want the Communist Party in Iran (Shamshiri Imruz, Autumn 1946). The government's condemnation of the Party as responsible for the creation of a class-struggle was inaccurate, since in fact aggravation of the class conflict was the result of the dictatorship of Riza Shah, who made the majority poorer, and a minority richer.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important features of the period under study is that Iranian policy was determined, and produced, by an interaction between the country's internal troubles and her external relations.

On the positive side of occupation of Iran by allies was that Iran achieved her goal of freeing the country from Riza Shah's regime and enormous freedom was suddenly granted to the political parties and trade unions.

Departure of Reza Shah was the introduction of 'fractions', discussion groups which were very like parties in all but name, for example, conservative, liberal and radical; these fraksiyuns supported different foreign powers. These groups, however, did not represent significant political growth throughout Iran or the blossoming of many new parties, which followed on the political hiatus which existed from 1925 until 1941. Of the many new groups formed during this new period of relative freedom of association, the most important was the Tudeh Party.

Although the party itself catered for minorities in various dependent groups, it had an ambitious appetite for its allies, trying to swallow each collaborating party into the Tudeh itself, and achieving 'take-overs' of this sort by control of the newspapers of the Anti-Fascist Society and Freedom Front of the Press, for example, which directed its activities against "class reaction" and "royal dictatorship". By such manoeuvres, support was won particularly in the North and the South-West, amongst the intelligentsia and the urban working-class.

The Tudeh Party in reality failed because of the ignorance of the population, their willingness to believe the central government, and the weakness of the democratic process in Iran, and it took five years for the Tudeh Party to finally reorganize itself (Bayaniyya yi Kumita yi Markazi yi Hizbi Tuda, Mar. 1946).

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چكيده:

حذب توده در راستاي آگاهي طبقه گارگر فعاليت هاي وسيعي انجام داده و سعي مي كرد با بالا بردن سطح آگاهي سياسي آنها، طبقه گارگر را براي احراز حق و حقوق خود و تشكيل اتحاديه هاي كارگري تشويق كند. مجدانه از طبقه كارگر مي خواست كه از حذب توده كه (براي رفاه كارگران تلاش بسياري مي كرد) پشتيباني كنند. از مرام و برنامه حذب توده كاملا مشخص بود كه اين حذب چه اندازه به طبقه كارگر وفادار بوده و از حقوق زنان كارگر و بخصوص از افراد آسيب پذير پشتيباني مي كند.

در صنايع خورد شرايط كارگران نامساند بوده و هيچگونه رفاه نسبي وجود نداشت بنابراين حذب توده تلاش مي كرد كه كارگران را براي تشكيل اتحاديه ها ترغيب و رابطه كارفرما و كارگر را بهبود بخشد، و رفاه كارگران را از طريق اتحاديه ها تامين كند. بنابراين براي حذب توده اتحاديه هاي كارگري بسيار مهم بوده و براي تشكيل اتحاديه هاي متعدد در صنايع مختلف اقدامات موثري انجام داد.

واژگان كليدي: حذب توده، اتحاديه هاي كارگري، كارگران، رفاه، شرايط صنايع.