

22/3/TRADE UNIONS

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**Labour Unions,
Law and Conditions in Iran
(1900 - 1941)**

by
Willem Floor

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Part I. LABOUR UNIONS

1. Introduction

Iran in 1900 was a pre-industrial country and one of the poorest and least developed in the world. It had a small urban labour force, which for the greater part worked in traditional artisanal workshops, whilst a small but increasing part was formed by wage-earning workers. The majority of the urban labour force was organized in traditional craft and trade guilds, which represented the interests of the employers rather than of workers. This labour force moreover did not share any socialist or trade union ideals.

Nevertheless some sort of labour movement can be observed as of 1906 until 1912, which was often the result of activities by Iranian social-democrats preaching their gospel in, for example, Tabriz; sometimes such labour activities were obscured by simultaneous political objectives such as anti-Russian actions in Resht and Enzeli. Since the labour class in Iran had no true representative, for the guilds cannot be considered as such, the few labour movement activities expressed themselves through (or at least were felt to be) opposition. A weak government and some sympathy among reform-minded politicians were the main reasons why the purely labour demands were met. However, when reaction set in and Russian influence increased after 1910, these labour activities were no longer tolerated. The most coherent (or is it just the best documented?) action of labour was that by the printers' union in 1910 in Tehran, which at the same time was the last turn-out of the labour movement prior to the first World War.

It was only at the end of this war in 1918 that the labour movement was reactivated. From the beginning, the trade unions and other forms of labour activities were influenced by the Communist Party of Iran (CPI). From 1921 the Iranian unions were affiliated with the Moscow-based Profintern, the International Trade Union Movement. This control of the labour movement by the CPI was an important reason why the labour movement remained alive for some time, while at the same time it was one of the main reasons for its demise and lack of success.

The CPI, being a Marxist party, regarded the state as the most powerful tool for the liberation of the working class. The workers therefore had to gain control of the state for, in order to overcome hostile legislative, political and social resistance, workers had to acquire political power. There was another reason why the worker organizations tended to become instruments of political interest groups: there was a rather strong movement among the leading political groups in Iran to modernize the country, which led to conflicts with conservative groups. Although the worker organizations were weak, they, because of their concentration in the important political centre of Tehran, constituted one of such modernizing groups, while at the same time they constituted an important political instrument to promote the cause of the progressive forces. The leaders of the CPI and the labour movement therefore were more interested in political matters than in bread and butter issues. This development was enhanced by the fact that the leaders of the labour movement did not originate from the working class itself, or from the class of artisans who were or felt threatened by foreign imports or the establishment of modern industrial plants. For both the CPI and the trade unions were started and led by men whose material and cultural background made them members of the middle class. The workers in general had neither the time and energy, nor the understanding and capability to organize labour activities, let alone a labour movement. These members of the intelligentsia, being Marxists moreover, considered labour problems as being an integral part of the socio-economic and political system in which imperialism and capitalism were the moving forces. The influence of Great Britain on the Iranian economy, the links between the governments of Iran and Great Britain, and the fact that Iran's most important and modern industrial activity, the oil industry, was owned and managed by Great Britain, supported such an analysis. It goes without saying that the Soviet Union was regarded as friendly towards the labour movement and the main bulwark in the fight against imperialism and capitalism. The presence of foreign-owned and/or -run enterprises on Iranian soil made labour activities a rather complex and difficult affair, since such labour action automatically acquired political overtones other than purely

national ones. It meant on the one hand that the labour movement had to cope with two opponents, the national bourgeoisie and the foreign (British) power, while on the other hand it presented labour with an important instrument of political mobilization in the form of anti-British or xenophobic sentiments.

The primary aim of the labour movement in Iran therefore was the destruction of imperialism and capitalism. In the early 1920s the labour movement scored some notable successes with bread and butter demands, which partly explain its early growth and relative success. This development was made possible by the existence of a rather fluid and unstable political situation and the absence of a strong government between 1918 and 1923. The weak cabinets were in constant fear of attacks by the 'progressive' groups with which the labour unions were affiliated and therefore preferred to give way in some of these labour matters in order to hold their own in the political field.

This early success of the labour movement in Iran is the more striking since the unions were rather weak organizations to carry out effective bargaining. This was because of their low degree of organization due to a low level of class consciousness and fragmentation of the urban labour force itself. Moreover, owing to the extreme poverty of their members, the unions lacked proper funds, and even the financial subsidies from the Russian legation could not properly deal with that problem. Finally, purely economic action was therefore a rather ineffective weapon, the more so since the relationship between labour demand and labour supply was not favourable. Although we do not have data on the level of unemployment in the urban areas of Iran, the mass character of the seasonal pre-1914 migration to Russia, for example, is an indication that there was a considerable labour surplus.

With the advent of a strong centralized government in 1923, led by the autocratic Reza Khan, there was no room for rebels against society. He persecuted both the CPI and the labour movement and finally forbade their existence. The suppression of the labour movement was executed with great ease, which underlines its weakness. During the 1930s several observers therefore could rightly state "there are no labour unions" in Iran. For, apart from a few isolated labour disputes, the labour movement

was unable to organize itself either locally or nationally. The fact that after 1941, when labour unions could legally be formed again, it took some years to do so, only strengthens this observation.

2. The Beginnings of the Labour Movement (1906-1911)

The year 1907 was an important year for Iran, for it acquired a Constitution as well as its first trade union and experienced its first labour strikes. The constitution established, inter alia, the right of free speech (art. 20), free association and free assembly¹ (art. 21) and thus constituted the legal basis for union activities. Under the influence of social-democratic ideas, which had been disseminated among certain sections of the urban labour force in Iran, the printers of the Kūchekī printing shop in Tehran established the first trade union in Iran in 1907². The creation of this trade union was the result of the dissemination of 'modern' ideas from Europe among the intelligentsia in Iran. In general these ideas dealt with other, democratic forms of government. Their influence on the reform-minded sections of Iranian society were instrumental in bringing about and deciding³ the course of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-09. With regard to the position of the lower classes, and labour in particular, the main source of information was formed by the social-democrats in the Caucasus⁴. The presence of tens of thousands of Iranian migrants, however, did not lead to a discernible and effective sensitization of that labour force to social-democratic ideals. It is therefore misleading when Abdullaev asserts that Iranian migrants in Russia in general were of great importance for the formation of the Iranian working class⁵.

It was only in 1904 that the social-democrats in the Caucasus created an organization called 'Hemmat' with the express purpose of organizing Moslem workers in Russia politically⁶. Although its prime purpose was to sensitize Iranian labour to political matters, the Hemmat organization did not neglect to pay attention to the important question of labour rights. its programme therefore also aimed at:

- the eight-hour working day, and
- the right to strike to settle labour disputes.

Shortly after the creation of the Hemmat organization a similar one was founded in 1905, namely that of the Eǰtemā'iyūn 'Āmiyūn-e Īrān (Socialists) which also stood for the right to strike. Although founded in the Caucasus, this organization soon also created branches in Tabriz, Mashhad, Tehran, Khoi, Isfahan, and Enzeli⁷. In Tabriz the Armenians played an important role through their Dashnakiyun party. These groups had strong contacts with the social-democratic party in Baku, while contacts also existed with progressive thinkers such as Şūr Esrāfil, Malekolmotakalleṡīn and 'Alī Akbar Dehkhodā, who later would play important roles in the constitutional movement⁸.

In view of the fact that the social-democrats constituted only a small insignificant group with some kind of organization in only a few Iranian cities and with hardly any contacts in the labour force, it is surprising that in 1907 a great many strikes occurred in Iran. These strikes were partly the result of the political situation at that time, partly the expression of growing labour unrest sensitized by social-democratic ideas. It is indeed noteworthy that these activities were restricted to those areas which had been both the scene of strong support for the constitutional movement as well as the areas exposed to social-democratic influence.

The first labour strike appears to have taken place on November 21, 1906 when the fishermen of Enzeli protested against Liazonov, the Russian fisheries concessionaire. The fishermen gathered in the telegraph office of Enzeli and made it known that henceforth they would keep all the fish that they caught for themselves. Liazonov paid them only one shahi for each fish, an amount they considered too small. The government sent troops against the strikers and in the ensuing scuffle one fisherman was killed. The fishermen were not beaten, however. They also refused mediation by two local influential leaders, Vazīr-e Akram and Shariatmadarī, whom they sent packing with a shower of vilifications. The strike was very popular among the population of the North, and the inhabitants⁹ of Resht wanted to boycott Russian goods to show their feelings.

In January 1907 a strike of telegraphists occurred in Tabriz to enforce the payment of their arrears¹⁰, while in the spring of 1907 the printers in Tehran went on strike out of solidarity with one of their colleagues, who had been beaten by E'temādossaltāneh, the chief of the government printing office. The strike lasted until E'temādossaltāneh had been dismissed¹¹.

In April 1907 the telegraphists went on strike in Tehran and other cities to demand higher wages and better treatment¹². One month later, in April 1907, a strike occurred in Enzeli. The dockers and sailors of the Enzeli-Baku shipping line demanded a rise in wages. The dockers wanted more for unloading Russian ships, a demand which was refused. The dockers then refused to unload ships until their demand had been met. After that, ships were unloaded in the estuary of Enzeli, which had not been customary up till then¹³. During the summer of 1907 the printers of Tehran again went on strike, this time to demand shorter working days. Their strike was successful, for their working day was reduced from fourteen to nine hours¹⁴.

The strike wave continued, however, for on August 2, 1907 the workers of the electricity plant of Emīnolžarb in Tehran organized a strike. They demanded paid leisure days, just like government officials. Further, they wanted clothes paid for by the employer, since because of their work their clothes were torn and they had to get several suits each year. Finally, they wanted a certificate of good behaviour on dismissal and the establishment of a health and safety fund. For "it is customary all over the world that in case of industrial accidents the workers get paid until they are healed, or in case of death that the wife and children receive assistance". The strike lasted three days during which time no electricity was supplied to the city. It is not known whether the strike had any success¹⁵.

Strikes were contagious owing to the political climate created by the recent acquisition of a constitution in Iran. For on August 11, 1907 the tramway workers in Tehran demanded better working conditions, although they held permanent jobs. They wanted paid holidays "as is usual elsewhere in the world"¹⁶.

Government officials also caught the infection, even at an unexpected Ministry such as foreign affairs. On October 1, 1907 the Ministry had already been on strike for a few days because

the minister¹⁷ had not shown a proper respect for his collaborators.

It would appear that other trade unions were formed in those days besides that of the printers in Tehran. For, later in 1922 the recollection of these earlier groups served as an incentive to try to resuscitate them¹⁸. One such group was no doubt the Anjuman-e etteḥādiyeh-ye telegrāfi led by Beshāratossaltāneh, which was founded in 1908 to provide its members with mutual support¹⁹. The existence of similar groups among the dockers and boatmen of Enzeli, the shoemakers in Tehran, the printers in Isfahan, the tramway officials and droshkechis in Tehran and the carpet weavers in Kerman is also reported²⁰.

The establishment of such groups undoubtedly helped to maintain solidarity among the workers concerned. It also made it easier to start new strikes demanding better working conditions, pay and rights. In 1908 Enzeli was again the scene of strikes by fishermen against Liazonov. Although, in December 1908, the government sent the Cossacks against the strikers, in April 1909 they again organized a strike²¹. Earlier that year - April 1908 - the boatmen of Lengerud struck for higher wages²².

On October 28, 1908, Tabriz had a strike on its hands, for 150 workers of three tanneries demanded improved working conditions and more labour rights. They had been organized by Russian social-democrats, who also directed the strike. The workers made the following demands:

1. A pay rise of one and a half shahi per skin
2. That the appointment and dismissal of workers and apprentices should take place with the permission of the workers
3. Improvement of health conditions
4. Payment of doctor's bills by the employer
5. Payment of 50% of the salary in case of illness
6. Less overtime
7. In case of overtime, payment of 200% of the normal salary
8. No dismissal of strikers during the strike
9. Payment of wages during the strike
10. No exclusion of workers who participated in the strike

The strikers had formed a committee to negotiate upon these demands with the employers. The result was that the strikers returned to work on October 30 when three of their demands (1, 8, 10) had been met. Although solidarity among the workers had been strong during the strike, the negotiating committee wanted to establish a strike fund for workers who were without means.

When one of the employers did not stick to the agreement (he dismissed a foreman, a member of the negotiating committee), the workers used the weapon of boycott against the employer. At the suggestion of their social-democrat mentors, the workers first found another job for the foreman and then persuaded prospective candidates for the vacancy, not to apply. Although the employer offered better terms for this vacancy there were no applicants. The result of this action, unfortunately, is not known. Although the social-democrats wanted to form a trade union in the future, for the time being they preferred to organize and interest the labour class politically²³.

Notwithstanding the early enthusiasm shown by various groups of urban workers to fight for better wages, rights and working conditions, they lacked organization, funds, political backing and support from the working class in general to withstand the political changes in Iran, which were inimical to the rights and interests of the lower classes there. For, although the constitutional forces were able to defeat the counter-revolution mounted by Moḥammad 'Alī Shāh, they were not able to cope with their own inadequacy. The Democrats, who favoured all kinds of reforms, including the labour laws, were faced with a strong majority of so-called Moderates, or rather conservatives, who, backed by Russia and Great Britain, proved to be too strong for them. Many potential bazaari supporters, moreover, joined the Moderates at the urging of the 'ulamā'. "The clergy, who had a vested interest for opposing reform, fooled the public, especially craftsmen and tradesmen, into believing that the Democrats were the sworn enemies of Islam"²⁴.

Not only were the guilds effectively barred from representation in the Majles (Parliament), but all 12 trade unions were forcibly dissolved as well²⁵. Although these trade unions were

said to have put up a fight, we have hardly any information on this issue to confirm, assess or gainsay such a statement.

However, it seems unlikely that labour put up a fight. The sections of the labour class who were politically aware were both geographically and numerically restricted. The majority of the urban working class were not at all exposed to trade union ideas and remained within the traditional fold of the guilds. In the labour force dominated by the guild organization, affiliated as it was with politically traditional forces, there was no interest in labour matters. The unorganized casual labour in the cities was not fertile soil for the blossoming of workers' ideals either²⁶. So the very few professions which were new and modern, namely, the printers and telegraphists, constituted in fact the only real organized labour organization in Iran. A similar situation may have existed among the workers (dockers, boatmen, fishermen) in Enzeli for they had been exposed longer to social-democratic ideas than any other group of workers in Iran. A unique situation existed here, viz. that a considerable number of these workers were influenced by Russians who took these revolutionary ideas 'en bloc' with them²⁷. There is no sign whatsoever that exposure of Iranian migrant workers to trade-unionism and social-democracy in Russia led to any lasting activity among workers.

The above is also borne out by the fact that the best organized section of the labour movement in Iran, the Printers' Union in Tehran, put up the only real fight. As in European countries, the printers belonged to the best paid and educated part of the working class, with a high level of organization and class consciousness. They also supported the Democrats. In 1910 there was a constant exchange of portfolios by the Sepahdār's cabinet which the opposition newspapers ridiculed, while they also spoke in disrespectful tones about the Sepahdār and his new ministers. On May 25, 1910 the offending newspapers were suppressed by order of the cabinet and their editors were ordered to appear in the courts of justice to be tried, but this they refused to do²⁸. The printers, protesting against the cabinet's measures, organized a strike. When the police interfered, the strike leaders took sanctuary in the Majles (parliament) building to enforce the release of the arrested strikers and the

acceptance of their demands²⁹. These were the following:³⁰

1. The working day is to be nine hours
2. The minimum wage is to be three tomans (about 75p) a month, wages to be increased on a scale varying between five and twelve per cent, according to the amount. For instance, the highest wages mentioned, 20 to 25 tomans (£4-£5) a month, to be increased by five per cent. Above all, the wages must be paid regularly
3. If a workman is dismissed through no fault of his own after six months' service, he must receive fifteen days extra wage. If after one year, a month extra
4. He has also the right to fifteen days' notice and, should the establishment change hands, he can demand wages for that period from the original owners
5. The editors and managers must treat their employees with politeness
6. In the case of continuous night work, a night staff must be employed at one and a half times the day wage. In the event of the day staff being employed on special occasions at night, they must receive a similar increase
7. In addition to the usual feast days, one day a week must be free
8. In case of illness, a workman must receive his full wage, but on recovery he must return to his work
9. Every printing office must have its own doctor in attendance
10. In case of temporary disablement, the workman is entitled to a full wage for as long as three months
11. In the case of complete disablement, the amount of compensation to be fixed by the employer and the representatives of the workmen
12. In the case of death, the compensation to the family of the deceased to be settled as in the preceding instance
13. Every printing-office must have a manager
14. Regulations must be drawn up for all printing offices by the owners and the representatives of the committee of workmen.

In June 1910, under the leadership of the Central Labour

Council (ettefāq-e kārgarān-e markazi), the printers carried on their fight. As a result of their strike there were no newspapers. In order to inform the general public about their grievances and demands, the printers published their own newspaper called 'Labour Union' (ettefāq-e kārgarān), of which only five issues in all appeared³¹.

Although none of their demands was met, it did not break their fighting spirit. The more so, since Sardār Āsad, the other strong man of the cabinet, allowed the papers to reappear again, upon which the Sepahdār withdrew from the cabinet. In 1911 printers all over Iran even created a national printers' trade union³². Nevertheless, for the time being they appeared to be a spent force. The atmosphere in Iran was hostile to the further development of trade unions in Iran, for, after 1911, northern Iran was virtually under Russian occupation and they stood no nonsense from Iranian workers as the dockers in Enzeli knew from experience. Moreover, after its 'surrender' to the Russian demands the Majles was not convened again until 1914. With the suspension of parliament - the main controlling agency with regard to the implementation of Iran's constitutional rights - these rights, including the freedom of association, were suspended as well³³.

In the South there was no labour organization outside the guilds. Nevertheless, some labour unrest occurred here also, when in April 1913 the deputy-governor of Kerman published a set of regulations on conditions to be maintained in the carpet factories in that town. However, it was not the weavers, but the employers who went on strike³⁴. A similar lock-out took place in October 1913 in Kerman, again by the employers of the carpet factories. But this time the weavers, angry at this political act, (the employers were protesting against some taxes) took sanctuary in the British Consulate, for they were most grievously hurt through enforced idleness by this strike³⁵.

The unsettled political situation and the crisis occasioned by the violation of Iran's neutrality during the first World War, made Iran the scene of war, which excluded any by organized labour action. Moreover, the Majles, which had begun its third session on December 6, 1914, was suspended again on December 14, 1915 and for the next five and a half years Iran had no

parliament and no proper government. The country was on the point of dissolution, while factionalism, local uprisings and warlordism ravaged what had survived the vicissitudes of war. With the Russian Revolution of 1917, the role of Russia in Iran also changed. It still wanted to influence events there, and some Bolsheviks even argued that Iran was "the first nation to be conquered by the Soviets"³⁶. But the interference was thenceforth aimed at the 'progressive' forces and not at the elite. The new Soviet government wanted to organize the revolutionary power of the working and peasant class of Iran. Thus Russian support also provided an impetus to Iranian progressive forces, both inside and outside Iran. During the war, Iranians in Baku had established 'Adālat' (Justice), which formally constituted itself into a party in 1917 under the same name. Its aim was to prevent the old conservative forces regaining control in Iran and one of the means would be the formation of trade unions. It was not the only progressive organization, of course, but it was the best organized party with the widest distribution of organizational structures, having branches in most big Iranian cities³⁷. In June 1920, under the influence of a similar development in Russia, the Adālat and Hemmat parties dissolved themselves and, together with other leftist organizations, formed the Communist Party of Iran. The intended activities of this and similar organizations coincided with labour unrest which had arisen spontaneously in Iran as a result of the miserable conditions under which the people existed.

3. The Golden Age (1918-1925)

a) The situation in Tehran

Towards the end of World War 1, in the Winter of 1917/18, thousands of people in Iran died of hunger and cold. This situation was further aggravated by hoarding and short-selling to customers by the bakers³⁸. This provoked reaction on the part of the workers in the bakeries. They formed a trade union and forced the government to recognize them by organizing a strike and closing down all sales points for bread³⁹. Although this led to a temporary improvement in the bread situation, (for hoarding was soon resumed), the first union had been born again. At about

the same time, a second trade union was formed by the printers⁴⁰. They organized a strike during the 'hunger demonstrations' in 1917/18 and, while waving red banners to express their support for the Russian revolution, attacked the shops of bakers and hoarders with the other demonstrators. The police broke up this demonstration, but not the new-found solidarity among the printers⁴¹.

In 1918 they organized another strike which lasted two weeks and forced the government to recognize them as an official trade union. By that time the printers' union had 2,000 members. The new union was able to force the employers and the government to accept their demands, the most important of which were:

- 1 An 8 hour working day for all printers
- 4 Overtime paid at the rate of 150 per cent of the normal wages
- 6 In case of illness, the employer to continue to pay the wages for a period of two months as well as the doctor's bills
- 15 In case of dismissal, the employer to give one month's notice and pay one month's wages
- 22 In case of an industrial accident leading to invalidity of a worker, the employer to pay the disabled worker half a month's salary for a period as long as the printing establishment has existed. Moreover, in addition to Fridays, workers to have a right to free days on festive days to a maximum of 25 days per year as well as the right to ten days of paid holidays for each year worked.

Equally important was the fact that both the government and the employers had accepted the principle of collective bargaining and agreements in case of the printers' union⁴².

Another old acquaintance, the Telegraphists and Postal Workers' Union also came alive again and, with allegedly 2,000 members, was second only to the printers' union. This nationwide union was at first not recognized by the government, which did its best to have it dissolved, though without success⁴³.

Although the renaissance of the trade union movement was initiated by the printers and the post officials, this proved to be an

incentive for other trades as well to form unions. Especially in 1918-1919 a few of these groups, such as the tramway officials and construction workers, were active in opposing the government led by Vozūqoddouleh on the Anglo-Iranian Treaty. Apart from demanding expulsion of the British from Iran, who had still troops there, their demands centered on such questions as the hoarding of grain, the 8-hour working day and the right to form a trade union. The turn-out of the unions supported by these other labour groups⁴⁴ was quite big in the autumn of 1919 during an anti-British rally, during which the demonstrators demanded the release of Soleimān Mīrzā, a Socialist leader,⁴⁵ who had been interned by the British in India during the war. Although several of these groups clearly only had short-term political ends, as shown by their sudden demise, the trade union movement nevertheless was contagious and successful. The anti-British attitude amongst the population in general continued to be an important mobilizing factor for political and labour organizers⁴⁶. As is shown by Table 1, the years 1920-1923 were the hey-day of trade unions in Iran. This held especially for Tehran, which was, with Gilan (Resht, Enzeli) and Tabriz, the main centre of trade union activity. From two unions in 1918, the movement grew to ten unions in 1920⁴⁷. By the end of 1921, of the 20,000 reported trade union members in Iran, Tehran accounted for some 8,000. At that time the trade unions claimed a level of organization of 20 per cent of the total urban industrial labour force in Iran, which they estimated to be about 100,000⁴⁸. By November 1920 the trade union movement had gained such strength and popularity in Tehran that in November 1921 the union organizers decided to create a Central Union Council (ettehādī-ye markazī-ye koll-e kārgarān-e Tehrān) which at the same time joined the Profintern, the Moscow-based organization of international Red Syndicates⁵⁰. At the summit of the trade union movement (1922-23) this central council represented sixteen unions. According to its secretary, Shokrollāh Mānī⁵¹ the membership of the central council in 1922 was as shown in Table 2. The task of the Central Council was to guide and instruct existing unions and to organize new unions. Each union was represented by three members of the Central Council, which met regularly every Thursday evening in the office of the Haqīqat newspaper and

TABLE 1: Trade Unions and their Membership in Tehran ⁴⁹

name	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
1 Printers	180	200	200	250	150
2 Salesmen (merciers)	350	-	80	-	-
3 Bakers	3 000	2 000	1 800	-	-
4 Trade clerks	250	200	-	-	-
5 Post workers	90	100	120	-	-
6 Telegraphists	180	564	564	-	-
7 Confectioners	300	400	400	-	-
8 Shoemakers	1 800	1 800	1 800	150	-
9 Tailors	2 000	1 000	2 000	15	-
10 Lace-workers	150	150	150	-	-
11 Teachers	-	480	400	-	-
12 Taftuni bakers	-	-	720	-	-
13 Municipal workers	-	-	500	-	-
14 Cigarette makers	-	-	2 500	-	-
15 Textile workers	-	-	-	200	50
16 Pharmaceutical workers	-	-	130	100	-
17 Construction workers	-	-	-	400	40
18 Bath-house attendants	-	-	-	200	-

TABLE 2: Trade Unions Represented on the Central Council in 1922

1 Printers' union	9 Cigarette makers' union
2 Shoemakers' union	10 Bath-house workers' union
3 Bakers' union	11 Drapery workers' union
4 Pharmaceutical workers' union	12 Salesmen's Union
5 Teachers' union	13 Textile workers' union
6 Post office officials	14 Dockers' union (Enzeli)
7 Municipality workers' union	15 Taftuni makers' union
8 Construction workers' union	16 Stocking makers' union

later in a rented house in the Khiyābān-e Nāṣeriyeh⁵².

Mohammad Khān Dehqān, the editor of Haqīqat and president of the Printers' Union was a member of the Communist party of Iran. He was a leading force in the trade union movement and he worked hard on its behalf. Through men like Dehqān⁵³ the Communist Party, which had declined considerably⁵⁴ after the collapse of the Gilan republic, tried to make a come-back⁵⁴. The Communist Party therefore had instructed its cadres to work in such a way that people did not make a direct link between the Party and the trade unions. Although the Communist Party did not formally control the unions, in reality it had direct control over them. Within each union the members of the Communist Party constituted a secret inner circle to influence the decisions and actions of the unions⁵⁵. One might say the whole show was run by the Communist Party in collaboration with the Russian embassy in Tehran.

It is therefore not surprising to observe that the accredited Iranian delegate to the 1922 Fourth Congress of the Communist International confidently reported that the party achieved good results among the unions. "The party's main task was to strive for a common anti-imperialist front by establishing a democratic bloc to which all national and democratic groups might belong, but in which the leading role would be played by the CP"⁵⁶.

Apart from politicizing workers by urging them to form unions, for which purpose large amounts of money were later spent by the Russian embassy (through the CPI, unions, or otherwise) on propaganda aimed at influencing young government officials, progressive intellectuals and (skilled) artisans, the message was strongly anti-British, and very critical of the old feudal and aristocratic families. People were exhorted to be freedom-loving and to support the Constitution. It was moreover stressed that a modern progressive, if possible socialist, government was near. Care was taken that Russia should not be mentioned, unless to show how well people (especially workers) were treated there⁵⁷. The medium of the message were a few newspapers, amongst which was the so-called trade union newspaper, Haqīqat, which in reality was one of the organs of the CPI⁵⁸. The same also held true for its successor Kār, and other progressive newspapers such

as Eqdām, Setāreh-ye sorkh, Tūfān, Siyāsat, Shāhīn, Shafaq-e Sorkh, and some others. All these papers received financial support from the Russian embassy.

The Russian embassy in 1922 also tried to organize a communist trade union. One Shareman Khān, a tailor working in the Russian Legation, was asked to form this union. During the constituent meeting, Dehqān attended for the Printers' Union and 'Alī Mīrzā, a bootshop owner, for the Bootmakers. It was decided that Dehqān would be the president of the Union, and Mohammad Khan, its treasurer. The programme of the union was as follows:

- 1 To bring together workmen of all nationalities together into one union for mutual support.
- 2 Each class of workmen e.g. chauffeurs, bakers, etc. to have their separate committees which will in turn be under the Central Committee.
- 3 Each group of workmen must be ready to support another group e.g. by strikes etc.
- 4 The newspaper Haqiqat to be the official organ of the Union of Workmen; the cost of running this paper to be paid from the treasury of the Central Committee.
- 5 Employees in Government departments can also become members.
- 6 Fifty per cent of the money collected in the treasury to be spent on unemployed members.
- 7 The Union to have a free school, library and hospital for the use of members and their families.
- 8 The Union to have close touch with similar unions in Russia.
- 9 The Union to arrange to have translated into Persian all papers and books received from Russia which relate to workmen's unions in order that they may be accessible to members.
- 10 Assistance in organizing unions for any particular trade may be obtained from Russia, whence expert organizers can be sent to assist.
- 11 Efforts must be made to start similar branches of the Union in other towns in Iran.
- 12 Only people who are genuinely employed in some trade can be enrolled as members of the Union.

dissolve the Iranian Communist Union of Workmen, for it had failed to draw a sufficient membership⁶⁴. In its place, a professional union was created on September 10 which was open to all nationalities. It was the clear purpose of this union to fill its ranks of the union with Russian citizens, who in this way would try and attract Iranian members. The president of the Union was Romanovski, while its office was in the Vneshtorg premises⁶⁵. The driver of the Russian Legation tried to organize a similar union in February 1922⁶⁶.

To what extent these Russian endeavours were successful is unknown. Since no other source makes mention of them we may conclude that all these efforts came to nought. The Russians had some success with the organization of a union among the Armenians in Tehran to which end Nerces Necessian had been specially sent from Moscow⁶⁷.

In 1922 the CPI sent Rezā Rūstā and Pīshevarī from Baku to Tehran to take over the running of the Central Council, which was very much resented by Dehqān and led to friction between them. But, since they had to work in secret, this dispute did not lead to open hostility⁶⁸.

To create a better political climate for the Unions, the CPI tried to create a political platform for them by establishing links with the leader of the 'minority' action in the Majles (parliament), Soleimān Mīrzā, leader of the Socialist Party (Ejtemā'iyūn 'Āmeyūn)⁶⁹. This link was necessary, for the CPI had no representatives in the Majles and the unions still had to fight for official recognition. On January 22, 1922 the Majles deputy, Seyyed Ya'qūb, declared that in Iran there was no working class, and thus there existed no labour problem⁷⁰. Some other conservative deputies, led by Noṣratoddouleh, created a rural workers' union which tried to invalidate the Labour movement⁷¹. Later, the conservatives promoted the creation of an employers' syndicate, which was led by influential Tehrani bazzaris⁷². The 'majority' in the Majles clearly wanted to destroy the unions⁷³.

The CPI-financed newspapers attacked these conservative deputies and exhorted the workers to support the unions⁷⁴. A publication by the Central Council, published in Ḥaqīqat, stated that "it was necessary to show that there are workers who form a considerable class in Iran....Joining the union is an expression

considerable class in Iran...Joining the union is an expression of loving your country and of support for the Majles and as a protest against those who sell our country"⁷⁵.

Of special importance was the fight of the post officials against the government for the recognition of their Union and the role of the Belgian advisor Molitor. The Union accused Molitor of obstruction and efforts to have their Union dissolved and tried to have him dismissed. The Union fought and created an issue about Molitor by accusing him of fraud. This led to a fierce discussion in the Majles. The cabinet of Qavāmossaltāneh then issued a decree forbidding government officials to be members of a trade union. This caused an outcry in progressive circles and, backed by the 'minority' group of Soleimān Mīrzā,⁷⁶ they worked together to bring down Qavāmossaltāneh's cabinet.

Apart from establishing their political credibility and appealing to patriotism and xenophobia, the Union leadership also had more practical means to create unions. Shokrallāh Mānī, himself a textile worker, wrote that when Seyyid Moḥammad Khān Dehqān approached him and his colleagues about the formation of a union they liked this idea "after he had explained what his (Printers) Union had done and achieved. The more so when he outlined that by unity they might get a raise of pay"⁷⁷.

The moment was well chosen, for the employers wanted to lower the wages by one abbāsī per azar'. When the workers had been given a small amount of money as an advance payment they liked the idea of a strike for a higher wage, since they could afford not to work for a few days. The strike took place in April 1922 and lasted one day. When the weavers won it was quite understandable that the Union became very popular and all 700 of the weavers joined⁷⁸.

In those golden days the Central Council could indeed hold out the promise of a successful strike. In the second half of 1921 the record had been very successful with strikes by the Bakers' Union, the Printers' Union, the Postal Officials' Union and the Mercers' Union. In Enzeli, moreover, there had been a successful Dockers' Union strike⁷⁹.

On December 24, 1921 the teachers of Tehran went on strike because their wages had not been paid for six months. The strike also had another objective, namely to protest against the

government decree that no government officials were allowed to join a union. After three weeks strike the government resigned, although it is not clear whether it was due to this strike or to other political reasons. On June 24, 1922 the new government formed by Qavāmosaltāneh decided to ban seven newspapers affiliated with the opposition. He also had their editors arrested. As a result of these activities, the Central Union Council met and decided to call a general strike if the government did not release the arrested printer and lift the ban on the publication of the papers. On September 9, 1922 Qavāmosaltāneh, faced with this threat, gave in to the Unions' demands. Another strike by the printers of the Majles printing office in 1923 was also a Union success. The government met all its demands - a wage increase, a vacation of ten days per year, and abolition of the rule that Majles printers (who were military personnel) could also be called upon to do duties other than printing⁸⁰.

Not only success and financial support for strikes drew workers to the unions. The various individual unions led by the Central Union Council also organized a great many events to enhance workers' social life. The union member, 'Alī Zhāleh, for example, opened a reading room for workers (qerā'atkhāneh-ye kārgarān) in the Lāleh Zār avenue. This was not free from harassment and the lease was withdrawn from 'Alī Zhāleh, who however, was soon able to re-open his reading room in the same street in May 1922⁸¹.

Apart from literature⁸² the Union also had several publications through which to disseminate their ideas among the populace. The most famous one was Haqīqat edited by Dehqan,⁸³ which in fact was an instrument of the Communist Party. According to Mānī, Haqīqat had a readership of 4,000, while it was so popular that a copy of Haqīqat could be resold at much higher prices than the subscription rate. It appeared to have attracted the attention of conservative circles also, who eagerly read the contents of the paper⁸⁴. But Haqīqat was not the only the paper dealing with union issues. After its demise there was the newspaper 'Kār', Eqtesād-e Irān, and of course Komūnist, the official CPI paper⁸⁵. In the provinces we see Takammol, the paper of the Hezb-e Kārgarān in Tabriz⁸⁶. In 1923 a new Armenian

newspaper, subsidized by the ⁸⁷Russian Legation, named Banvor (workman) was published in Iran. The CPI, through the formation of Komsomols, also established links with the Unions and youthful members, trying to influence them through the handwritten journal Bolshevik-e javān ⁸⁸.

The Union also had its own theatrical group, which performed all kinds of plays which they themselves translated into Persian. The leader of the group was Rezā Qolī Abdollāhzādeh (Şeifī), a printer by profession, and member of the Central Committee of the CPI ⁸⁹. Some unions also organized parties, for which some even had a club ⁹⁰, such as the Armenian socio-democratic Hanchak party in Tabriz. The Russian Legation also opened a Russo-Persian workman's school and ⁹¹a workmen's club in Tehran where all kinds of lectures were given. A very famous club was that of 'Farhang' in Resht, led by Keshavarz, which ⁹²received a monthly subsidy of 40 tomans from the Russian Legation. The Farhang Club was founded in 1917, and formed the model for two other important similar cultural clubs, the Farhakht club in Enzeli, and the Parvaresh club which was founded in 1924 in Qazvin. Both these new clubs were founded with the help of members of the Farhang Club, which kept regular contacts with its younger counterparts. All these clubs staged plays, were active in the field of adult education, and in general worked to elevate the level of knowledge of its members ⁹³. The Socialists also had their own club in Tehran just like the Armenian Hanchak party in Tabriz, while the former also ran a co-operative shop in Tehran ⁹⁴.

The most important festivity for the labour unions was of course Labour Day. It would appear that the first Labour Day celebrated in Iran was in 1920, organized by the socio-democratic Armenian Hanchak party. It was reserved for party members only. ⁵⁸The first Labour Day demonstration in Tehran took place in 1922, about which the British reported that it was a failure and had been organized by the Russian Legation. "The only people who stopped working were the printers. Political meetings took place at the Shah's mosque and in one or two quarters of the town, but meetings were badly attended and no enthusiasm was shown" ⁹⁶.

In the summer of 1923, during the elections for the Majles, Reza Khan took sudden and unexpected steps against the unions. He wanted to become the next prime minister and found the unions

posed too much of an obstacle for his liking. Through his military commanders he had the unions suppressed all over the country. This action led to the near annihilation of the trade union movement of Iran⁹⁷.

After Reza Khan had become Prime Minister, however, the union organizers took heart again and started to re-build their organization. They also continued their political activities and concentrated on anti-British agitation. The excuse to do so had been offered by the British who had expelled some Shi'a ulama from Iraq⁹⁸. This led to popular demonstrations in Iran in July 1923, which made intelligent use of the tiny trade union movement to propagate its own message. During these demonstrations militant union members carried banners with such texts as: "Hail the Union of Workmen and the Religion of Islam"⁹⁹ in line with the policy of CPI to create an acceptable image for the unions and to appeal to the religious belief of the workers.

In November 1923 another such demonstration was held outside the northern gate of Tehran, which was attended by some 5,000 to 6,000 people. The trade union movement organized a strike that day and all shops were closed after 13.00 hours. The pupils of the Islamiyeh school attended the meeting as well and sang the "Workman's song". A similar meeting was also held in December 1923¹⁰⁰.

When Reza Khan returned to Tehran on November 11, 1923, he was welcomed by all kinds of social groups, who all displayed banners in the bazaar. The Union of Printers was represented by a banner with the text "The Union of Printers welcomes Sardar Sepah, the defender of the Workmen's Unions in Iran!"¹⁰¹

How did this turnabout occur so soon after the suppression of the unions by Reza Khan? The CPI was hoping for the establishment of the republic of Iran by Reza Khan and his army. The party therefore, supported by the Comintern, decided to support the republican objectives of Reza Khan, since his role was seen as an intermediate one in the progress to a socialist state¹⁰². The unions therefore were instructed to support Reza Khan just as were the other instruments of the CPI. The opponents of Reza Khan were to be fiercely opposed and attacked, and as much support as possible had to be mobilized in his favour. The CPI and its supporters all joined the 'Nahzat-e

melfi' movement, which constituted the focus of attention of all republicans in Iran. Funds were made available by the OGPU to Soleimān Mīrzā to buy Majles deputies¹⁰³. In this way the CPI and the unions contributed to Reza Khan's accession to the throne.

In 1924 the unions were only 1,300 members strong and, despite their political activities, were unable to attract the same attention as in former years. On May 1, 1924, the printers celebrated Labour Day with a one-day strike which was the last time they were able to do so publicly¹⁰⁴. At that time Reza Khan still did not want to alienate forces who were supportive of his cause. In that same year the municipal workers went on strike, because they had not been paid for a long time. Although their demonstration led to clashes with the police, their demands nevertheless were met¹⁰⁵.

All this changed in 1925. Reza Khan had to abandon his flirtation with the Republic after pressure from the 'olamā' in Qom¹⁰⁶. This turnabout led to clashes between the republicans and Reza Khan's supporters. During the elections for the Majles which had to pave the way for his accession to the throne, Reza Khan ordered a total suppression of the unions and the CPI¹⁰⁷. In both objectives his army was totally successful.

b) The situation in Gilan

In other towns in Iran unionism was alive as well, principally in Gilan, Tabriz and Mashhad which, according to Ossetrov, was due "to their greater knowledge of workers' movements in Russia"¹⁰⁸. In Gilan unionism was strong among the dockers, fishermen, and porters. The Fishermen's Union was also affiliated to the Central Union Council and its leader, Akhūnzādeh, even replaced Dehqān, when he was away in Russia¹⁰⁹. In 1922 especially, these unions were reported to be very strong, although the data on their membership is conflicting. According to Ovanesiyan, the Porters' and Boatmen's Union, each had a membership of 700 to 800 and, together with the fishermen, of more than 1,000, although the latter had a fluctuating membership¹¹⁰. However, other sources state that 3,000 fishermen were unionized, of whom 30 per cent were Russians, while the strength of the Porters' and Boatmen's Unions was estimated to be only 150

only 150 to 200 each. Moreover, within this union a great variety of people had been brought together which gave rise to internal conflicts, for even big proprietors were members¹¹¹.

The Russians by various means tried to propagandize for the unions, both as an instrument for Marxist propaganda as well as a successful means to defend labour rights. At the end of 1922 the Kavkaskaya Corporatsie was set up in Enzeli by the Russians. It was a kind of cooperative society for the benefit of the workmen and it was led by a Russian called Sagaev. The society imported all kinds of goods, the profits of which went to their workmen who were members of the society¹¹².

In Resht the unions were also quite strong with some 3,000 workers organized from various trades such as printers, hat-makers, and leatherworkers¹¹³.

The activities of the unions were not appreciated by the government and in 1923 the military commander arrested their leaders, which was a blow to both the unions and the CPI¹¹⁴.

Nevertheless, undoubtedly with help from the Russian consul, new activities were started again. In 1302 Ordibehesht/May 1923 an Etteḥādiyeh-ye kārgarān-e bīkār-e Gīlān was formed in Enzeli, which drew the attention of the Majles to their lot, and asked that measures be taken to create employment for them and their colleagues elsewhere in Iran. In their published statement they exhorted other unemployed workers to follow their example, for only through the creation of unions and unity could they better their lot¹¹⁵. This union apparently belonged to an Etteḥādiyeh Committee, whose existence the British reported in March 1924, which had a branch in Resht. Most of its members were boatmen, porters and the unemployed. The head of the Enzeli committee was Šafar, a boatman, and in Resht it was headed by 'Abbās Qolī, a tin-smith¹¹⁶. The unions were apparently strong enough to resume their various activities, for in the same year of 1924 they celebrated Labour Day in Enzeli¹¹⁷.

The Russians did everything they could to fix people's attention on socialist ideas, and the consul in Enzeli formed a workingmen's society for workmen of all nationalities. He himself attended all their meetings, which took place on Thursdays¹¹⁸. Whether this club was similar to the cultural society Farhang in Resht seems unlikely. This club was led by

Keshavarz, son of Vakīlottojār, an influential member of Resht society. The Farhang society also received a monthly subsidy of 20 to 30 tomans from the Russians¹¹⁹.

The Russians also created a union in Resht which was led by Mohammed Aliov, an employee of Persaznaft. All those who worked for Russian enterprises and all Soviet citizens had to join this union. However, the local military authorities used this compulsion as a pretext to prohibit the union and forced its dissolution. The latter then organized a purely Iranian 'Union of Workers' of Gilan and assured its immediate success by enrolling the large number of workers employed by the military on the construction of barracks and roads"¹²⁰.

Nevertheless independent unions continued to exist in Resht and Enzeli, which continued to receive support from Russia. The latter sometimes used ingenious methods to disguise these financial subsidies. In 1925, for example, the Union of Resht sent, through the Soviet consul in Resht, a red banner to the workmen of Russia, for which kindly act the union received a gift of 1,500 tomans in exchange¹²¹.

c) The situation in Tabriz

In Tabriz in particular the labour movement appears to have been fairly strong. Here a Workers' Party (ḥezb-e kārgarān) was formed, which could only be joined by those who did not exploit other workers¹²². The Workers' Party apparently had difficulties in applying this criterion to everybody's satisfaction, since it is reported that there were internal troubles. By the end of 1921 the Workers' Party had a membership of 3,000¹²³. At the same time a shopkeepers' association was created, for the position of these shopkeepers did not differ much from that of the wage-earners. These petty traders did not make much money and were completely dependent on a few rich people who owned their shops, and often also supplied them with their raw materials as well as mediating the sale of their products. The Workers' Party organized the artisans on the basis of their craft, whose representatives elected a General Council which settled all important matters in collaboration with the Council of the union. The result of the merger between petty traders, artisans and wage

labourers was a membership of 12,000. Backed by this force, the General Council was able to enforce a decrease in shop rent of 20 per cent. The government tried to win over the Workers' Party to its own political position, but failed to create sufficient interest in such an affiliation. When the offer of collaboration was turned down, the government tried to use coercion. This led to a clash between the Mayor of Tabriz and the Workers' Party, which demanded the Mayor's dismissal. At first Mokhberos-saltāneh, the governor-general of Azarbaijan refused to accede to this demand. But, after a general strike by the bazaar, he gave in¹²⁴.

In Tabriz, the Workers' Party is not heard of again after its initial success. It may have been suppressed after the Khiyābānī revolt¹²⁵. Nevertheless union activities can also be observed in 1922, when a Teachers' Union of Azarbaijan was created, the first of its kind in that province¹²⁶. We further learn about a strike of railway workers in June 1922, while in 1925 a Toilers' Party (ḥezb-e ranjbar) was active in the national republican movement (nahzat-e melī)¹²⁷. In that same year the Russian trade organization in Azarbaijan was also trying to force workers of all crafts to join unions which they had formed, by underselling non-members in almost every craft¹²⁸.

d) The situation in Mashhad

In Mashhad we learn about a Ḥezb-e Ranjbarān (Toilers' Party) which was formed by 'the revolutionary committee', a group having links with the CPL. In view of the special local conditions, Mashhad being a 'holy city', the socialist message of its programme was framed in Islamic phraseology¹²⁹. Whether the party had any impact is unknown, since no further information is available about it.

In 1922 and 1923 the Etteḥād-e Khorasān (Union of Khorasan) led by Mīrzā Aḥmad Dehqān, editor of Febr-e Āzād (Free Thought), was very active in Mashhad, mainly in the political field. Dehqān and his ally, Seyyed Mehdī Esfahānī, who founded the Tailors' Union in 1923, were strongly anti-British and had good relations with the Russian Consulate¹³⁰. Dehqān took care, however, to cultivate the 'olamā'. During the expulsion of some

olama from Iraq by the British in 1922, he printed a long Congratulatory Address on behalf of the Union of Workers in his paper, which was presented to Sheikh Mohammad Sadr, one of the expelled 'olama, on his arrival in Mashhad¹³¹. In 1923 the Union of Khorasan organized a strike to protest against the fact that Dehqān was not only excluded by the governor of Mashhad from standing for election for the Majles, but was also excluded from the board of supervisors of the elections. Even the complaints of the Russian consul-general proved to be ineffective¹³².

All these activities came to nought, however, or so it would appear, for in January 1925 it is reported that "a new organization has recently been formed called the Kumiteh-i Kargarān", from which one may conclude that the earlier organizations either had ceased to exist or were ineffective. The moving spirit of the Workers' Committee was a certain Aliev, the assistant of the Soviet consul-general. The membership included¹³³ three editors of local papers and two police officers.

e) The situation elsewhere

In 1925 the existence of an Armenian communist "Workers' Union" is reported in Qazvin, as well as one for Iranians called "Hauzeh-yi Tarakki-yi Azadi, which was previously known as Azad khvahan, which was led by Mirza Abdul Samad" (Kambaksh?)¹³⁴. In other towns of Iran we do not know whether unions existed - Ossetrov reported that they existed in Qom, but no further information is available on them¹³⁵. Undoubtedly some interest existed among the working class in the new ideas, as indicated by the presence of "representatives of the labourers, tinkers, blacksmiths, and working classes who eulogized the Soviet government during the opening of the Russian consulate-general in Isfahan in June 1922"¹³⁶.

f) The situation in the APOC area

The oil-industry in Khuzestan, which started its operations in 1908,¹³⁷ had to use for management and skilled labour, employees from Britain and India. The Indians, together with

Armenians, filled the middle ranks. The demand for unskilled labour was met by Iranians,¹³⁸ mainly people from the surrounding tribal areas. The workers were hired from foremen, (sarkar) who each led a work-gang and who received a small amount of money from the men working for them.¹³⁹ Not only was it very difficult to keep these workers, but in the beginning it was very difficult to get them at all¹⁴⁰.

It was only in 1914 that the first labour trouble is reported. Two workers were killed as a result of an industrial accident. Their colleagues asked the APOC to support the families of the deceased, and to take precautionary measures. The APOC, so it is claimed, refused to deal with the demands of the workers, who then began throwing stones at the living-quarters of the British staff. All work in Abadan was stopped, and the APOC turned to the ruler of Khuzestan, Sheikh Khaz'al, for assistance. After Sheikh Khaz'al had dealt with the demonstrators, the APOC decided to form its own police force. This force was commanded by British officers and was instructed to prevent any untoward activities on the APOC grounds¹⁴¹.

New trouble arose in 1920. The Amritsar riots of 1919 had led to some political agitation among the 3,000-strong Indian labour force in Abadan. The agitators found fertile ground for their ideas owing to the bad living conditions, low wages, and bad labour relations. On December 9, 1920 the Indians went on strike, and they were joined the next day by the Iranian labour force. Their demands were:

1. An increase in wages;
2. A reduction of their working hours per day;
3. Additional pay for overtime;
4. Improvement of sanitary conditions and an end to vilification and molestation of workers by staff members.

The APOC was obliged to give in to appease the workers, and granted a rise in wages of 80 per cent. The newly-arrived APOC manager tried thereafter to improve the wage classification system, as well as the working and living conditions. Although some improvements were made, there was no structural change in

living and working conditions¹⁴².

Labour troubles broke out in 1922 in the APOC area. It was again the Indian labour force which was active, probably due to some political agitation as well as their living conditions, which remained bad. According to newspaper articles in the Indian press, the labour conditions of Indians working for the APOC were very bad¹⁴³. In particular the detailed charges made by one of the APOC employees, Mudliar, led not only to an investigation by the British political resident in the Persian Gulf, but also to a strike.

The charges made were as follows:

- 1 Insufficient accommodation for second-class passengers on river steamers plying between Mohammerah and the river head, and inadequate arrangements for securing the comfort of passengers at halting places en route;
- 2 Insufficient accommodation on arrival at the oil-fields, including the absence of cook houses and latrines and the turning of a deaf ear to all complaints on this score;
- 3 Inordinately long working hours;
- 4 Exhibitions of class hatred, by which is meant differential treatment of Europeans and Indians based on the racial prejudice of the former;
- 5 Callous treatment of patients;
- 6 Inadequate supplies of furniture and provisions even on payment;
- 7 Insufficient pay, which did not admit of remittances to dependants in India;

The investigation carried out by the British Consul found no grounds for the accusations made by Mudliar. In fact he noted that, due to the liberal treatment of Indian clerks by the APOC, it was very difficult to recruit such clerks and maintain them in government service in Khuzestan and the Gulf¹⁴⁴. The possible detrimental effect on recruitment possibilities by such articles mentioned by the consul, however, did not materialize. In 1925 as many Indians were working for the APOC as in 1922¹⁴⁵. From this one may conclude that, if anything, the treatment meted out by the APOC was certainly better than elsewhere.

Moreover, the consul found no proof of Mudliar's allegations either. It was true that accommodation on the river steamers was limited, but those who could not get cabins (which also held for Europeans and Iranians of good class) could always avail themselves of the abundance of shelter which otherwise was available for deck passengers. The APOC, moreover, held that in most cases cabins had been available and that in view of the expected increase in numbers of passengers extra cabins were being constructed. The APOC would also see to it that any congestion would as much as possible be avoided in future and that applicants would be informed by their recruiting agents that in exceptional circumstances it might be necessary to travel as deck passengers.

The arrangements for passengers on shore were quite adequate, rest houses and food were available and an APOC representative present.

The living quarters for the clerks and coolie lines in the field were on the whole good, it was found. However, due to bad planning and rains, congestion had occurred, so that some clerks, amongst them Mudliar, had experienced considerable discomfort for a few weeks after their arrival. The APOC maintained that the living quarters had been ready before their arrival, but that heavy rains had destroyed outhouses and several walls of the living quarters, which could only be repaired when weather conditions allowed this. The consul confirmed that this situation had been exceptional and that he would therefore urge the APOC always to have more accommodation ready than required.

The consul did not find any evidence either for the claim that exceptionally long hours, about the length of which there was no certainty at all, had to be worked. Overtime was also found to be minimal, and in that case European staff had been present as well. Nor did the consul find any evidence for racial prejudice against Indians nor was he given any concrete examples.

Mudliar's statement about the APOC hospital he qualified as a "malicious falsehood", for the hospital was the most modern of its kind in the East, where no distinction was made between the patients on the basis of their nationality¹⁴⁵.

The consul could not substantiate Mudliar's charge with regard to supplies of furniture and provisions either. The

quarters of the clerks were well supplied with furniture and utensils free-of-charge by the APOC. Provisions could be obtained from the numerous local Indian and Iranian shopkeepers as well as from the APOC stores. The Consul appended a list of goods which Mudliar had bought at these stores during January 1922¹⁴⁷.

The consul held that Mudliar's article had been written to put pressure on the APOC in order to get a higher salary. A few weeks before Mudliar wrote the article, he and a few other Madras clerks had demanded that they be given an initial salary of Rs. 200 per month. These were all recent recruits and had been engaged against a salary of Rs. 150 per month "rising by yearly increments of Rs.10 to Rs. 170" per month. They based their claim on the fact that other Indian clerks had been engaged at Rs. 200 per month. The APOC told them, however, that they had signed on for Rs. 150 and that a contract was a contract. Moreover, it was up to the employer to pay higher salaries above the contracted rate on the basis of merit and the quality of the work delivered. In addition to their salary, the clerks also received a field allowance of Rs. 20 per month, and the consul ascertained that, among the most vocal clerks claiming higher pay, the ability to remit money to India was about Rs. 70 per month¹⁴⁸.

Notwithstanding this situation, a number of Indian, Iranian and Arab labourers went on strike at Abadan on March 14, 1922, claiming higher pay. The APOC refused to give in and summoned Sheikh Khaz'al from Kuwait, who soon dealt with the Iranian and Arab workers. The British themselves dealt with the Indian labour. The political resident gave lengthy interviews to their leaders, who refused to give in. Since the APOC had raised their salaries in 1921 by 80 per cent it was considered that their demands were unreasonable. When the men refused to return to their work, they were repatriated to India because of breach of contract. The leaders refused to go, unless all strikers were sent on one ship. This was impossible as they numbered some 2,000 or about 50 per cent of the total Indian labour force. With the aid of a landing party of HMS Cyclamen, which had arrived on March 18, and four companies of Indian infantry from Basra, the strikers were embarked on 2 ships without problems and

the labour troubles were over¹⁴⁹.

After these troubles the British legation took an active interest in any Communist activity in the APOC area. In July 1922 the Legation reports that eight Iranian communists had arrived from Baku and were reported to have instructions to obtain work in the APOC oil-fields with a view to organizing communism among the workers¹⁵⁰. This, however, seems unlikely, for Lahuti reports that the CPI preferred not to draw too much attention to itself by creating trouble in the APOC area in view of the importance of the operations there for the Iranian economy¹⁵¹.

Nevertheless, in 1924 the British legation reports about the presence of an Indian, Moḥammad Khān, a mechanic in the service of the APOC, who was engaged in forming workmen's unions in Masjed-e Soleimān. Probably as a result of his activities, the Indian labour force went on strike in 1924, which the APOC management was able to put down. As a result of this experience the APOC decided to reduce the number of Indian workers and replace them with others. This development was already to be observed in 1927, but from the data available it cannot be deduced, as Ferrier has it, that Indian labour was replaced by Iranians. Although it is true that the number of Iranian workers increased concomitantly with the reduction of Indian workers, at the same time a similar increase of other foreign labourers is to be seen. In view of the level of development of Iran one must assume that these foreign labourers took over the jobs vacated by the Indians¹⁵². The Legation commented that the infiltration of Bolshevik agents into the oil-fields was considerably facilitated by the presence of the Russian consul at Ahvaz. About the latter, the Legation reported in January 1925 that it had received reliable information that the consul was trying to establish influence among the employees of the APOC¹⁵³. To that end, the Russian consul-general in Isfahan had probably been ordered to "cease or reduce subsidies to Persian Communist or Socialist organisations and to devote the money so made available to secret service work in Fars and Khuzistan"¹⁵⁴. These activities undoubtedly resulted in the creation of the first trade union of oil workers in the end of 1925.

g) Guild Unions

The unionizing of workers coincided with the growth of activities among the guilds in several Iranian cities. Although these guilds had no links with the Communist party of Iran or with the Profintern, they nevertheless felt some kinship with the unions, as shown by the contacts which existed between the two, types of organizations. In Tehran a Central Guild Council (Anjoman-e markazī-ye aṣnāf) had been established in 1906, while at the same time the Guild Committee (Hei'at-e aṣnāf) in Yazd, the Public Union Organization (Majma'-'e ettefāq-e 'omūmī) in Kerman, and the Guild Council (Anjoman-e aṣnāfiyeh) in Shiraz came into being¹⁵⁵.

In Isfahan, for instance, about 40 guilds had united themselves into one guild-union, while in Tabriz and Kermanshah respectively 40 and 20 guilds had created united organizations. In Isfahan each guild had two representatives on the Central Union Council, who were chosen for a period of four years. This Central Council was charged with the co-ordination of the political interests and activities of the guilds concerned. Its programme consisted of the following objectives:

- 1 The protection of the Iranian constitution and the Fundamental Laws;
- 2 The prevention of the rigging of the elections for the Majles and the election of trustworthy persons belonging to the middle class;
- 3 The implementation of measures aimed at improving artisanal production methods and its maintenance at a high level as well as waging a battle against false imitations;
- 4 The protection of the interests of artisans¹⁵⁶.

Although the objectives were clearly restricted to those of the petty-bourgeoisie and had nothing in common with those of the CPI or the labour unions organized by the CPI, the guilds in their fight to defend their economic interests occasionally recognized the unions as their allies. This kinship had been formalized in the Hezb-e kārgarān in Tabriz. But when, for instance, a dispute broke out between property owners and shop-

keepers in Hamadan about the level of shop rents, the Guild Union (Eteḥādiyeh-ye 'omūmī-ye aṣnāf) in Hamadan sent a telegram to the editor of Haqīqat to report on this conflict. After an initial agreement on April 4, 1922, the shopowners withdrew from the agreement, whereupon the shopkeepers left the bazaar and erected stalls near the telegraph office¹⁵⁷. The flirtation of some of these guild-unions with the labour unions had no permanence, however. After 1925, Reza Shah used the guilds as countervailing instruments against union activities by inducing workers to join the government-controlled guilds¹⁵⁸.

4. The Reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941)

a) Introduction

Soon after his accession to the throne, Reza Shah dealt a heavy blow to the trade unions in Iran by having most of the cadres of the unions and the Communist Party arrested¹⁵⁹. This did not mean, however, that both the unions and the Communist Party were annihilated. These severely battered organizations went under ground to await better times. The Party did not allow its members much breathing space, however. Already in 1926 it ordered its cadres to be more active and to form a united national front against Reza Shah. This was very difficult since no labour unions, labour newspapers, or labour activities were allowed. Often only face-to-face contacts could be used to set up or resuscitate the unions. It was therefore decided that the real leaders would remain in the background. For 'public' affairs such as meetings and demonstrations, lower-ranking officials such as Mehdi Kameran would be used as a front¹⁶⁰.

Since no labour newspapers were allowed, the publications financed by the Communist Party continued their earlier policy of an anti-British line, only mentioning the USSR when there was something positive to tell¹⁶¹. In preparing the ground for the resurgence of the 'progressive' forces, the Communists were assisted by the Russian Legation, and its various other organizations, such as the OGPU. One of the newspapers in Tehran subsidized by the Russian Legation for instance, carried an article in November 1926 in which the journalist tried to prove that the tenets of the Koran closely resembled Marxist principles

and that therefore every faithful Muslim should follow the Marxist path¹⁶² as "blazed by the Bolsheviki" the British commented.

Notwithstanding the very smallness of the group of organized workers (Table 1) that had survived suppression by the police, the unions celebrated May Day in 1927. The printers as usual figured as an important group among the unionized labourers, while the construction and textile workers had also been able to weather the storm. In addition bakery workers, leather workers,¹⁶³ tailors and some others had retained some kind of cohesion.

b) The situation in Tehran

The Communist Party had a Labour Day bulletin printed secretly in 1927 and distributed it in Tehran. The May Day celebration itself took place on May 3, which was a Friday, in a garden outside Tehran. In small groups, in order not to attract the attention of the police, some 700 to 800 workers and party members met there, listened to speeches and sang worker songs. The inevitable red banner was not missing. Most of the workers were weavers, bakers, shoemakers, carpenters, chauffeurs and other craftsmen. After the official part of the celebrations were over, all participants had lunch together. Later, the hardcore of the participants, about 150 men, went again in small groups into Tehran to the Socialists' Club (klüb-e eĵtemā'iyūn) in order to have a Labour Day party there. Soleimān Mīrzā and Mīrzā Shehāb Kermānī¹⁶⁴, who were the leaders of the club, had to tolerate their presence, though they did not like having communists in their club. Although the police had no prior information about either the celebration of Labour Day in the garden outside Tehran or the party in the Socialists' Club, they nevertheless learnt about them later on. Soon thereafter there was a crackdown on communists and union members, and more than 100 of the latter were arrested. The government also closed the Socialists' Club, though it is not certain whether this happened because of the Labour Day party.¹⁶⁵

On May 10, 1928, Adībosāltāneh, the chief of police, had all printing houses searched, even to the lockers and desks of the printers, in order to get hold of the Labour Day pamphlets.

When such pamphlets were found, the guilty owners were arrested. Likewise those printers who had not worked on that day were arrested as well. This effort to arrest the leading elements of the Unions and the Communist Party proved to be a failure. Those arrested were released again after four to five months in prison¹⁶⁶.

Although forced into hiding, and having to start practically all over again, the party cadres renewed their activities and recruited many new union members. This time especially, the textile workers were very active, who recruited hundreds of their colleagues, or so it is claimed. In this new wave of unionism, drivers, bakery workers, carpenters, shoe makers, and the printers of course, further participated. The meetings of these unions were irregular and held in secret. Their activities, moreover, were almost exclusively aimed at improving working conditions in the various industrial establishments¹⁶⁷.

This new drive for unionism was the result of a decision by the Communist Party to establish a special union committee in 1928. Its task was to organize new trade unions. Members of this committee were Hejāzī, Ostād Mīrzā 'Alī Bannā, 'Aṭaollāh, 'Abdollahzādeh, and Ovanessiyān. Their main area of operations was Tehran, although links with the provinces existed, however weak these were¹⁶⁸.

This decision undoubtedly was the result of the III Congress of the International Red Syndicate in Moscow that year, during which the Iranian delegate Rezā Gholām 'Abdollahzādeh (Şeifī) had stated that the Iranian unions had no policy, no guide lines and no experience. He added that the unions needed an experienced leadership and support from outside. The logical place to look for that kind of support was the Communist Party of Iran but, in his own words, that party was in the same predicament. Summing up the union situation in Iran, Şeifī submitted that they neither knew how to defend labour's rights nor how to organize unions!

The Profintern discussed the union situation in Iran and condemned the "erroneous policies of the Persian trade union movement" because of their excessive emphasis on politics and the transformation of the unions into purely political organizations". Radical steps had to be taken and past errors had to be rectified. The Profintern to that end considered it

necessary to adopt the following resolutions:

- 1 To devote the maximum of attention to the amelioration of the economic conditions of the workers and to inaugurate the campaign for the eight-hour day in basic industries like match factories, textile mills, and leather works;
- 2 To construct a wide educational campaign concerning the importance of the trade unions as the class economic organizations of the proletariat, as against the guild organizations led by the agents of Reza Shah, into which the Shah's government wanted to drive the Persian workers;
- 3 In spite of all difficulties, to proceed to the organization of the most numerous category of workers, and the one most cruelly exploited by foreign capital, namely, the Persian workers employed in the oil refineries of the Anglo-Persian Company"¹⁶⁹

At the same time, i.e. March 1928, Agabekov, the head of OGPU in Iran¹⁷⁰, was busy trying to organize trade unions as well. The unions, which were aptly named sharekat-e jadid, were first formed among the cooks and domestic servants. It was also reported that attempts would be made to form unions among farmers and farm labourers as well as among cab drivers¹⁷¹.

The British also reported a meeting held by Rezā Khān Saqāṭforūsh, during which Gholām Hosein Khān Neẓāmoddoleh delivered an anti-British tirade. He told his audience that the socialists had by now also accepted communism as their official doctrine and that henceforth there was only one real Communist Party in Iran. The British reported that this group was also making headway with the organization of all kinds of trade unions¹⁷².

The Iranian government apparently also had information about these activities, for the police raided the Barq press in May 1928. The whole staff was arrested and the press itself closed. In connection with these arrests the police made another 250 arrests on charges of distributing communist leaflets in Tehran, probably referring to the distribution of Labour Day statements¹⁷³.

The trade union committee was of the opinion that Labour Day

in 1929 should be a national event, underlining the rebirth of the unions. Pīshevarī was ordered to see to it that in planned demonstrations progressive intellectuals, students, workers, and even apprentices should participate. In speeches and songs a cautious line should be taken, so that the government would not consider this a challenge to its authority. The theme of all public statements and expressions had to be support for certain aspects of government policy such as: "Help national revival against imperialism", "Close all banks etc. owned by Imperialism", "a law should be passed to protect labour rights"¹⁷⁴.

The setting of the Labour Day celebrations in 1929 in Tehran was the Moʿīniyeh garden. Early in the morning the workers had gathered there in small groups and were making merry. Political speeches were given by Jaʿfar Ordokhānī, while various representatives of the unions delivered short speeches. After lunch a special poem written for the occasion was recited, while the workers sung tunes accompanied by an orchestra formed by themselves. The organizers were very satisfied with the turnout, as it had been the biggest Labour Day celebration ever held in Tehran so far, and more than 2,000 people had attended.

When the merrymakers returned to town, the police noted there was more traffice than usual and after investigation realized that Labour Day celebrations had taken place in the Moʿīniyeh garden. The next day the police arrested about 50 union members and about the same number went into hiding or fled¹⁷⁵. Although the police tried to get information on their colleagues out of those they had arrested, they failed. They were all released finally under the general amnesty which had been declared on the occasion of the visit of Amānollāh, King of Afghanistan. There was one exception, Moḥammad Hejāzī, who had been arrested on his return from Russia where he had attended a meeting of the third Comintern. He died in prison shortly after¹⁷⁶.

Although the police had released the union leaders, they kept henceforth a close watch on any kind of meeting or gathering. All groups of more than three people in coffee houses, Mānī claims, were checked by the security police. The strict control made further activities impossible and May 1, 1929

was ^{the} last Labour Day celebrated in Tehran for the time being ¹⁷⁷.

c) The situation in Gilan

Trade Union activities elsewhere in Iran were also given new life by CP members as well as by Russian diplomatic representatives. In 1927 new unions were formed in Gilan, such as that among the tinsmiths (*ḥalabī sāz*), oil-bunker workers, and hat-makers in Resht. In Enzeli the following unions had been formed: the Porters (*ḥammāl*) Union, the Fishery Workers Union, and the Boatmen's (*gorjī bānān*) Union. In both towns the CPI also formed youth organizations (*komsomols*) which were also active in organizing unions ¹⁷⁸. An important development was the final agreement reached in October 1927 between Iran and Russia about Caspian fishing rights. In a note accompanying the agreement, Iran had stated that it "was duty bound to regard all political propaganda, all agitation, and even the organization of trade unions among the working population of the Caspian as detrimental to Iran's interests, and that such activity was considered illegal...those persons of Soviet nationality found guilty of provocation would be fully penalized to the full extent of Persian law". For the Russians this Note was a sore point, since they had long been trying to gain influence and sympathy among the workers of the Caspian via the trade unions. Karakahan, the Deputy Foreign Commisar, replied in an official note that "with regard to the organization of trade unions for Persian workmen and their admission to such unions, I have the honour to state that the Soviet Government takes note of your communication, since this question is within the competence of the Persian Government and a matter of internal Persian legislation". The Russians could give no other reply, of course. The more so, since the organization of trade unions was always done via men of straw and the Russians could always deny their own involvement. They had no intention whatsoever of stopping organizing Iranian labour and continued to do so ¹⁷⁹.

A setback was suffered in August 1928 when the porters in Enzeli petitioned the governor to be allowed to form a union which would be free of Russian influence. They stated that the Russian consul had been taking a portion of their wages for Russian

political work. The governor then had an agent of the consul arrested on August 27. He was released later on, but deported. The Porters' Union also informed the military commander about the political activity of the consul and accused their union president Keredjival Sorkhi, Shirinov the chief Soviet agent in Resht, and Rusto, another Soviet agent, of bearing the major responsibility for bringing their union into disrepute.

It would appear that the cause of this complaint was occasioned by the fact that the Russian-organized Porters' Union under Mohammed Jafar excluded Iranian porters, who were not members, from getting work at Russian establishments, a policy the Russians also followed in Tabriz. In Enzeli the Porters' Union was the only one allowed to load and unload the ships of the Russian Company "Moragent", and they would not permit porters employed by the customs department to work on these ships.

Owing to the open hostility which had broken out between the two groups of porters, the Russians decided to change their policy and opened branches at all Iranian ports as well as giving a share of the work on Russian boats to non-organized porters, i.e. the customs porters¹⁸⁰.

In January 1929¹⁸¹ the Union of Railway Workers organized a strike in Mazandaran, which may have been one of the reasons why, after the Labour Day celebrations of 1929, the new Governor-General cracked down on the CPI and unions in Gilan in a grand cleaning-up operation. It may also have been possible that this happened on the orders of Tehran, since a similar action was undertaken there. The Governor-General also dismissed the socialist telegraph master and broke up the Porters' Union¹⁸².

Unionizing activities were also carried on among the fishery employees, whose pay was administered by the Russians. According to the Governor-General, fifteen per cent of their pay was deducted and put into a provident fund. At Hasan Kiadeh the Russians had also started a school, but the Iranian government insisted on taking it over. The Russians continued their propaganda via the radio and social clubs. The Iranian police therefore received orders¹⁸³ to prevent the attendance of Iranian subjects at these clubs. However, other secretly-formed unions escaped the government's attention at that time. The same also holds for the National Union of Railway Workers, which had

started in Mazandaran in 1928 and operated in secrecy¹⁸⁴. Nevertheless, the Gilan unions were severely hit in 1931, and because of the many arrests, completely destroyed¹⁸⁵. This did not mean that the spirit of labour was totally broken, as shown in 1932 when the 800 port workers in Noshahr, who were said to have an illegal union, went on strike because they had not received their wages for four months. After a strike which lasted eight days, the workers got their wage rise¹⁸⁶.

d) The situation in Mashhad

Towards the end of 1928 the CPI concentrated its efforts on Mashhad, although that town could hardly boast an industry or of an industrial working class. Most success was achieved among the carpet weavers, the largest group of workers in the town, who were working long hours under miserable conditions for low wages. Hundreds of them joined and the union was even able to function partly in the open. To attract the workers, who were apparently organized by factory, a mutual assistance fund was founded, out of which workers could get loans or just financial aid. The party also organized adult education classes for union members and some 30 to 40 in fact attended these classes. To attract young people to the union and the CPI, a komsomol was created which cooperated closely with the union. Its main assets were a football team and a journal, Bolshevīk-e javān (young Bolshevik) which was handwritten and then copied.

Labour Day in 1929 was not a big affair, but this situation had already changed by 1930 when quite a number of workers joined the secret meeting in the mountains outside Mashhad¹⁸⁷. Another event which focused workers' attention on the importance of having a union was the murder of an apprentice carpet weaver by his employer on June 22, 1930. The murderer paid bloodmoney to his relatives in accordance with Muslim law, a pitiful amount of 25 tomans. The union used this occasion to distribute a statement on this incident among the workers, in which they were reminded of their miserable lot - only in unity lay their strength, only in unity could they take revenge for this murder, and could demand the prohibition of child labour up to fifteen years, proper wages, and an 8-hour working day¹⁸⁸.

Soon thereafter the police arrested many members of the CPI and the union as well as the executive committee of the union, about which we hear no more¹⁸⁸.

e) The situation in Tabriz

In Tabriz, union activities were also renewed. In 1930 the workers of the match factory went on strike to demand immediate payment of their wages, which were in arrears. The police arrested fifteen of their leaders and in this way broke the strike¹⁹⁰. In 1931 some unions were formed among the soapmakers, weavers and some other crafts. The unions participated in the Labour Day celebrations which took place in the mountains outside Tabriz. Gradually the CPI was also able to organize some unions in other towns of Azerbaijan, while a recently-formed provincial committee distributed a statement on its objectives¹⁹¹.

f) The situation in the APOC area

In 1925 the cadres of the Communist Party had been instrumental in forming a Trade Union among workers of the APOC¹⁹². However, this union remained totally inactive. As a result the Communist Party had to start all over again in 1927 when many new cells were created among the oil-workers. It appears to have been well-organized with a relatively large membership. One of its first acts was to organize a First Congress of Oil Workers, which met secretly in November 1927 and was attended by some 200 delegates. The Congress decided to expand its organization, to create workers' clubs and cooperatives, to take action against fines, beatings, vilifications and against the policy of discrimination among nationalities practised by the APOC¹⁹³.

Despite these decisions, not much was done. The labour leaders acted very cautiously with regard to the APOC in view of its importance to the economy of Iran. Labour feared that disruptive union action might lead to a severe crack-down by the government¹⁹⁴. Moreover, the APOC had its own police force with a security branch. Any militant action by unionized labourers led to beatings, intimidation or even dismissal with banishment from

the APOC area¹⁹⁵. At the end of January 1929, on the initiative of the provincial committee of the Communist Party, a Second Oil Workers' Union Congress was held. According to Setareh-ye Sorkh, 2,000 workers attended this meeting, which seems unlikely in view of the fact that the APOC would have found out about the meeting and would have broken it up. The congress discussed both organizational and political matters. Its programme of action was:

- 1 To fight for a change in the oil concession;
- 2 To claim the right to hold Labour Day on May 1, and organize strikes¹⁹⁶.

TABLE 3: APOC Staff and Labour in Iran 1910-32¹⁹⁷

Year	Iranians	Indians	Others	Europeans	Total
1910	2 724	316	292	80	3 412
1911	3 602	758	254	112	4 726
1912	4 898	1 106	194	87	6 284
1913	5 798	1 834	350	88	8 070
1914	5 488	2 148	750	128	8 554
1915	4 406	1 958	374	160	6 898
1916	4 670	2 732	208	240	7 850
1919	3 973	2 641	47	117	6 784
1920	8 447	3 616	35	244	12 342
1921	9 009	4 709	51	271	14 040
1922	18 441	4 285	2 940	490	26 156
1923	20 762	4 715	849	644	26 970
1924	18 384	4 731	648	738	24 501
1925	15 820	4 890	7 201	994	28 905
1926	15 843	3 588	6 042	1 020	26 493
1927	17 887	3 272	7 009	1 055	29 223
1928	16 382	3 050	5 365	1 000	25 797
1929	15 245	2 518	5 273	980	24 016
1930	20 095	2 411	7 549	1 191	31 246
1931	14 797	1 675	3 178	989	20 639
1932	10 343	1 420	2 346	744	14 853

Much has been made of the May 1929 strike in the APOC Abadan refinery, although so far no thorough discussion of these events

nor information about them is available¹⁹⁸. The story, as it is told by the leftists, is that the workers of the refinery organized the strike to protest against the lamentable working conditions and low pay as well as to give vent to their sentiments on the freedom to form labour clubs¹⁹⁹. Reading the British documents on the 1929 events, nothing of this kind is confirmed, although passing reference is made to the issue of the workmen's clubs. The main pre-occupation of the British, both APOC and embassy personnel, had to do with alleged Russian agitation and with alleged government support for these events. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is clear that the 1929 strike was a storm in a tea-cup, with no lasting influence on labour relations.

In 1928 the workers of Abadan, Ahvaz and Mohammareh organized semi-public clubs under such names as Naderi and Shapur. In March 1929 the workers organized a club which was exclusively restricted to labourers. The objective of these clubs was to promote sports activities and provide some social centre for the men; they enjoyed enormous popularity. The security office of the APOC considered these clubs as a means to organize labour, so it ended the existence of the workmen's clubs and organized one itself known as the Khayyam Club. Membership was also open to administrative staff, and the club president and his assistant Arfa'ossaltāneh and an Englishman, respectively were 'chosen' by the security office. When the workmen tried to take over control of the club, the security office had these men blackballed.

The dissatisfied workmen then founded a club themselves. Its opening day was said to have been attended by 700 men. The security office was also present and ordered the leaders of the club to close it since no permission had been given. The club leaders showed the security office a written permission by the government of Education, but this was considered to be insufficient, since permission from Tehran was required, not from the local representative of the Ministry²⁰⁰.

Both Persian and English sources agree that the immediate cause of the 1929 strike had been occasioned by the club question. Frustrated in their attempt to form workmen's clubs "those responsible for organizing labour in Abadan" according to

the APOC, or, the workers themselves according to Soltānzādeh, decided to try other ways and means to achieve their objectives²⁰¹.

From the British documents it is clear that attempts were being made to form Labour Unions, a development which the APOC abhorred. It was only in January 1929 that the APOC and the Iranian authorities learnt about the creation of a cell system among the refinery workers. By May 1929 the British estimated that there existed 30 cells in Abadan, each of which had about 20 members and was hierarchically controlled by foremen and gangers "who rank in this organization as officers and sergeants". There were also indications that two cells existed in Masjed-e Soleiman, two in Ahvaz, and seven in Mohammareh. The APOC had been unable to find out who controlled the cells, but it believed this master organization included seven Russians, four Tabrizi Turks, and four Isfahanis²⁰².

Elkington, the APOC manager, was informed that the strikers would occupy the site of the refinery and would demand from there what they wanted, viz:

- 1 Representation in the Labour Office and at Medical Examinations with special reference to the engagement and discharge of employees;
- 2 The increase of wages of labourers to the equivalent of Rs.45/- per mensem, which wage was formerly paid in 1923;
- 3 Leave with pay;
- 4 A six hour day;
- 5 Company quarters or rent in lieu;
- 6 No further demolitions to take place in Abadan or elsewhere;
- 7 Persian artisans to be placed on agreement in the same manner as indentured Indians;
- 8 All grievances to be investigated by the Persian Police authorities;
- 9 Persian clerks to be placed on the same footing as Indians;
- 10 Questions of dispute between Europeans and Persians or between the Company and Persians to be settled by the Persian Law Courts;
- 11 Pensions to be awarded as the result of long service or if discharged as surplus to requirements, instead of

gratuities, such pensions to be continued to the descendants of the employee after death.

The APOC induced the Iranian authorities to arrest 93 ^{active} union members on April 29, 1929 to abort the expected strike ²⁰³.

g) The 1929 strike at Abadan

Although the APOC manager did not consider the organized labour, which consisted mostly of artisans, sufficiently organized to carry out their intended strike, he nevertheless alerted the Iranian authorities and the British Vice-Consul. What made the APOC panic was the fact that four Russians named Fīrūz Moḥammadov, Khalīl Esmailov, 'Abdorrahīm Roshbilkov and 'Alī Qorbān Niazochli were constantly visiting Abadan and were in touch with the cell leaders. These were reported to be anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Russian steamer Michael Frunze, which it was feared would land arms in the country with the help of a pro-Russian customs inspector named Mīrzā Mehdī Khān Mīrzābān. During the night of May 2, 1929 Elkington even telephoned the Vice-Consul asking when the HMS Cyclamen would arrive at Basrah ²⁰⁴.

The arrival of the Governor of Abadan from Mohammareh, who, charged with full authority by the Governor-General, arrested some 25 persons immediately, did not succeed in setting his mind at ease, however. During the arrest, documents were found which, according to Elkington, proved beyond doubt that Moscow, through the four above-mentioned Russians, was behind it all, that is to say, an action aimed "not merely at causing strikes and sabotage in the refinery, but also at creating unrest in the Province" ²⁰⁵.

Elkington also informed the Governor of Abadan about imminent trouble. He handed him copies of all reports which he had, including all the names of the cell leaders and agitators. The Governor left immediately for Ahvaz to discuss this issue with the Governor-General. After some hesitation, the latter ordered the Governor and the Chief of Police Sarhang Roknoddīn Khān, to return to Abadan. The Governor returned to Abadan on the morning of May 3 and immediately went to see Elkington. After some deliberation, it was decided to arrest as many of the

ringleaders as possible. The arrests proceeded slowly, because the names of the ringleaders in the Company books did not tally with those used in the labour organization, "a significant fact" Elkington commented. It was only through the arrest of a cell leader, Seyyed Khalil, at 5.30 a.m. that a full list of the names of the leaders was found. By that time it had become known in Abadan that arrests were being made, though only nine men had been arrested so far. By 2200 hours some 30 to 40 persons had been arrested and pamphlets, instructions, a list of names, and the matrix of a cyclostyle from which a circular had been taken, were found as well.

These documents, according to Elkington, were considered by the Governor to justify his action, although he adds in the same breath that "there had been no leisure in which to examine documents or carry out further investigations". On May 4 some further arrests were made, bringing the total to 45.

During that day, the governor examined the documents and informed Tehran about the situation. Elkington was desperately curious to know what was in the documents, but he refrained from asking as he "had no desire either to harass them or to appear to arrogate to the Company a position which it had no right to assume". In the evening, however, the Governor, accompanied by the Chief of Police, paid a visit to Elkington. Both officials assured Elkington "that no further trouble need be expected at the moment", that the workers were quite ignorant of the true state of affairs, and that the workers had been influenced to join by the leaders because these told them that the "Government itself would welcome a step of this nature in order that it might take the opportunity to impose its will upon the Company and upon the British generally"²⁰⁶.

Although the Governor had not yet completed examination of the documents, he nevertheless had proof enough that the labour organization was controlled by a Central Committee of the Communist Party in Iran, and that a branch committee had been established in Khuzestan. Instructions by this Branch Committee to four of the chief leaders, three of whom had been arrested, indicated that the movement was not only interested in the APOC, but interested to reach all workers in South Iran. The Governor believed that the Branch Committee had contacts in Ahvaz, Main

Fields, and Haft Kel, to which places reinforcements were sent. Staggered by the deviousness of the operations, Elkington again inquired after the whereabouts and sailing dates of the nearest sloop, which was at Basrah²⁰⁷.

On the night of Sunday 5 May, Elkington received information that a demonstration would be held on the morning of May 6. The Iranian morning shift had not come to work by 3.00 p.m, but the Iranian night shift was willing to continue working. At about 5.30 p.m. about 40 men, mostly ex-employees, under the influence of arak and opium and armed with sticks and knives tried to prevent the labourers from entering the refinery. A group of townspeople, many of them women, all carrying Moharram flags, arrived somewhat later and mixed with the labour gang. In this way they prevented the men from entering the refinery, and through the general excitement tried to incite to join them in their protest. That this activity was premeditated and organized was clear from the fact that some men were detailed to picket the other main entrances of the refinery as well, where they also created a disturbance.

The group attacked the time office, but were diverted from breaking into the refinery through the arrival of the Governor and the Chief of Police and a few men, who took refuge in the fire station barracks when the mob noticed them. People were really excited by this time and were throwing bricks. Troops had been alerted by telephone and arrived in APOC trucks in half an hour. The mob then dispersed, and a few who had broken into the refinery were arrested. The troops took up guard duties both inside and outside the refinery.

Although Iranian labourers wanted to return to work, the Company preferred to wait until all the agitators had been seized, in order to prevent the ringleaders from entering the refinery. At 3.00 p.m. on Tuesday May 7 the night shift of May 5 was finally relieved, having worked for 32 hours, for which they were suitably rewarded²⁰⁸.

Elkington reported that the mob had made no demands, although he was informed they would make the demands mentioned above. He believed these so-called demands were only a smoke-screen for Communist activities. What these were he does not report, though he states that the majority of the labour force

just did not know what all the trouble was about.

Since the government had only 200 men available during the night, and since he did not know what to expect, he asked the Vice Consul to move the HMS Cyclamen closer to Abadan, but to stay out of sight, for this action was not reported to the Iran authorities.

May 7 passed without incident but, at the request of the APOC, the troops from Ahvaz were retained at Abadan. Those arrested the previous day had mostly been transported to Ahvaz, from where they would be deported to places outside Khuzestan. During May 2 and 6 a total of about 200 men had been arrested which included practically all of the cell leaders. The APOC Intelligence Bureau reported that the Branch Committee of the Communist Party had now decided to call off their plan, and that a new plan was being prepared to be implemented in a few months.

Trouble for the APOC was not over yet, for Elkington reported that disturbances were also to be created in Masjed-e Soleiman. The Governor-General, at his request, reinforced the garrison there with 50 horsemen. Action there, if successful, would affect Abadan, where the situation was still volatile. The relatives of the 200 deported men, who represented quite a large number of people, became the object of sympathy on the part of the population of Abadan. According to Elkington, outside agents stated that the deportees were martyrs for the community. A subscription list was opened for their relatives which was well supported. The resulting focus on these people, the expected arrival of another Russian ship on May 16 and the advent of Moharram (Ashura was on June 17) had all the ingredients for a renewed outbreak of demonstrations.

On June 2 it was reported that demonstrations of women were being organized for June 7 and 15 to mobilize support for the families of the deportees. There were still about 20 of these families in Abadan, who remained a focus of bitterness which lingered. Fletcher did not believe that Communists would carefully plan any demonstrations during Moharram. He considered it more likely that, if riots occurred at all, they would have been incited by Bushehr elements who were under the orders of one Seyyed Asadollāh Esfahānī, who in turn, was under communist

communist orders. However, this was later found to be wrong, for the Bushehri connection was represented by the Member of Parliament Mirza Hosein Movaqer from Bushehr²¹¹.

Movaqer²¹² was deputy for Khuzestan, a rich Bushehri, who in 1928 had been involved together with his son and three sons-in-law in the creation of workmen's clubs in Abadan. The APOC sent Mr. Gass to Tehran to discuss the problems in Khuzestan with the Minister of Court, Teimurtāsh. The latter at first created the impression that he agreed that the Communists were the cause of the trouble. At the same time, however, he stressed the need for an examination of workers' conditions, though he opposed any increase in the wages of Iranian employees. He promised that a special police squad would investigate the complicity of customs officials, two of whom would be removed. He further asked why the APOC had suspicions about certain prominent persons and expressed his annoyance about reports in British papers about the presence of warships. He threatened to withdraw Iranian protection for APOC operations in Khuzestan if British warships became a threat to Iran²¹³.

Gass had another interview the next day, May 30 with Teimurtāsh in which the Minister took a completely different line. He denied that there had been any Communist influence, and that Movaqer was involved with them. The latter had a grievance against the APOC and the Governor of Abadan because he had not got the concessions he had wanted to establish an electric-light installation in Abadan, and a tramway. Teimurtāsh further stated that the Governor of Abadan was an intriguer and would be dismissed. However, he assured Gass that the troops would be retained in Abadan, while the force of security police, which was to be formed, would keep in close contact with the APOC²¹⁴.

Clive, the British Chargé d'affaires, ascribed this change of attitude to the fact that Movaqer apparently enjoyed protection in very high places. So nothing could be done against him without documentary evidence, since any such complaint by a foreigner would be disbelieved as a matter of principle²¹⁵.

Meanwhile in Abadan the Governor quarrelled with the Governor-General and intended to resign anyway, whatever Tehran wanted to do. Although Teimurtāsh had expressed his doubts about Communist involvement, the authorities in Abadan obtained

Communist documents on the evening of June 7. As a result, four non-APOC employees were arrested. The documents contained instructions from the Central Committee of the Communist party for Khuzestan at Ahvaz appointing Comrade Rezā "as leader at Mohammereh and Abadan" and instructing all party members to "obey orders at the appointed date". The Governor-General, although promising reinforcements to Elkington, refused to arrest Comrade Rezā since it was the beginning of Moharram, a month when feelings ran high anyway.

The volatile elements in Abadan numbered by that time only 200 men, mainly Bushehris, both employees of APOC and others, who were expected to incite the general population of Abadan during Moharram against the APOC, and the British in general.

A new factor was the dissemination of nationalist and religious propoganda against the British, which led people to believe that the Iranian government was behind all this. Mīrzā Jalāl and Mīrzā Esmā'īl, sons-in-law of Movaqer, were meanwhile having meetings in their house at which they assured their audience that Movaqer would secure the release of the deportees. The Iranian authorities warned both men to keep a low profile.

Nevertheless, the APOC intelligence bureau had information that on the first of Moharram (the night of June 8), Movaqer's sons-in-law intended to attack the refinery with 150 armed Iranians, mostly Bushehris. These would incite the population with such slogans as "Down with the foreigners and unbelievers", "Khuzestan for the Persians", and of "let the sons of Darius enjoy the fruits of their land". Fletcher immediately contacted the Iranian authorities in Abadan and Mohammareh asking them to send reinforcements as had been promised. From his own sources of information Fletcher was firmly convinced of the reliability of the APOC information.

The Governor-General refused to arrest the ring-leaders when given their names by the British, because he said it would be fatal in Moharram. He nevertheless guaranteed the security of the refinery. Elkington wanted more troops, but the Governor-General refused, saying that he was prepared to face the riots which Elkington foresaw. It was clear that the Iranian authorities were very sceptical about the British reports of impending trouble. They held, moreover, that people would be

disturbed if troops were sent right then. The authorities also stated that Movaqer had nothing to do with the unrest among the Bushehris and that anyway they had sufficient troops, which Fletcher estimated to be only 250. He also urged Tehran to take steps with the Central Government to ensure that sufficient reinforcements would be sent, that all ringleaders would be arrested after Moharram, that steps would be taken against Movaqer and his relatives, and that practically the whole Customs Department would be changed.

In the end, the Iranian authorities were proved right and no disturbances occurred at all during Moharram. The situation returned to normal again, that is to say that Russian agitators were still reported to be active among the APOC labour force. Meetings were still being held by Movaqer's sons-in-law, during which the benevolent Russian role vis-à-vis that of the British was discussed. Although the secretary of the Chief of Police of Mohammareh participated in these meetings, the authorities did nothing.

The long-awaited demonstration by the women of the deported demonstrators finally took place around June 22, 1929. The women came from Abadan to Mohammareh where they went to the telegraph office and sent a telegram to Reza Shah, then they "proceeded to the Shah's statue, where they prayed and wept".

Although further troubles were expected on the fortieth day after Moharram, nothing happened, and the situation was back to normal again. Almost normal, for the special police squad sent from Tehran to investigate the cause of all the troubles, intimated to Fletcher that the causes were the APOC and himself, who were to create an excuse to land British troops. He also reports that the policemen tried to induce Iranian farrashes to obtain incriminating correspondence to that effect. Such a trend was in conformity with the general attitude of the Iranian authorities in the South, Fletcher reported, who appeared to favour the Russians and who refused to take any action against their alleged agents and the ringleaders of the troubles²¹⁶.

When examining the events of May, one comes to the conclusion that it was a great to-do about nothing. Apart from a scuffle with a few drunken men on May 6²¹⁷, and some demonstrations on May 2, nothing in fact happened. The APOC manager was

overcautious and ready to believe any story that was reported to him. Although Fletcher, who took a more down-to-earth view of events, bore him out as to the activities of the various elements hostile to the APOC and the British, he nevertheless characterized the policy of APOC throughout the trouble as a continued alternation between "cringe and scream", and the Governor-General of Khuzestan told Fletcher that he and those associated with him were frankly tired of Mr. Elkington's never ending cry of "Wolf"²¹⁸. A similar attitude also prevailed in the Royal Navy towards the APOC, which only had given filtered and selected information and wanted the Royal Navy to do its bidding²¹⁹.

The Abadan strike is hailed by contemporary commentators, and also by authors today, as an important event in the struggle for labour rights. Lahuti is one of the few dissenting voices, he states that the Abadan strike showed how inexperienced and awkward were the few CPI members who had been involved. In his version he also tones down the involvement of the CPI which had only sent a few agitators to Khuzestan to tell people how badly off they were. The conclusion cannot be but that the Abadan strike was a great to-do about nothing, which nevertheless had great propaganda value. However, the British ambassador in Tehran did not even refer to this event in his Annual Report²²⁰.

h) The Vaṭan strike at Isfahan

In Isfahan the first organized strike took place in May 1931. It was prepared by a committee that was affiliated with the Communist Party. This committee had decided that on May 1 the workers would strike to protest against the unjust conditions under which they had to work. In order to induce the workers to do so, the committee carried out a lot of propaganda and canvassing among the workers. Their effort was inadvertently aided by the management of the factory which, some time prior to May 1, issued a kind of labour contract in which amongst other things the following was mentioned: "if a worker does not give one month's notice before he quits work in the factory, the wages of one month will be charged to him and appropriated for the benefit of the factory fund". This, more than the communist propaganda, persuaded the workers to strike. The purpose of the

management had been to weaken the determination of the workers to strike, and to prevent it taking place. On May 1, in reaction to the invitations which had been extended to them, already some time earlier, some 60 to 70 workers arrived in a garden near the city. A red banner on which was written "Proletarians of the World Unite" was fixed to a wall. After long speeches by the party leaders and discussions, it was decided to strike on May 7 (16 Ordibehesht).

The management of the factory had prior knowledge about the strike, for May 7 fell on the Ghadir festival and a Thursday, and the management therefore declared an extra holiday and said that the workers had to come instead on Friday, their normal leisure day. This of course incensed the workers further. On May 15 the management put pressure on the workers to sign the new contract. They singled out one worker and told him that either he must sign or be dismissed on the spot. The worker refused and the others stopped work out of solidarity. A group of workers from another factory hall who wanted to know what had taken place were confronted by a closed factory gate and were forced to go back to work.

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. On May 15 and the night of May 15-16 the factory did not operate; the director even wanted to take on hand-weavers to continue production, but it was to no avail. After the workers had left the factory, they went to a site nearby. Some officials from the factory joined them there, and tried to persuade them to return to work. The workers refused, and they marched in orderly fashion in rows of four to the Chahar Bagh Theological School, where they formulated their demands to the factory owners. These were as follows:

- 1 Freedom to organize a union;
- 2 Changing from piece-work to a monthly salary in order to prevent the early incapacitation of the workers;
- 3 An 8-hour working day with sufficient pay, which should not be less than 5 qrans;
- 4 Leisure time for half a day with pay in order to be able to

enjoy a leisure day properly and to fortify themselves, so that they could perform the tasks in the factory the next week properly;

- 5 Abolition of the control system at the gate of the factory.
- 6 Abolition of the system of punishment with the stick, the bastinado and the branding-iron (the case of the dyer ^{Abolqāsem}) and of vilifications, money fines and groundless dismissal of workers by the chiefs, supervisors and the instructors of the factory;
- 7 Establishment of a fund for wages for those who have fallen ill or had an accident as a result of work in the factory;
- 8 Payment of all costs of treatment of the workers by the factory;
- 9 A special subvention in the way of double pay in case of overtime (just as the money fines were levied at twice the level of the wages);
- 10 Total time off on Fridays and public holidays in accordance with the government calender for all parts of the factory;
- 11 The maximum working day not to exceed 10 hours, i.e. only to include a maximum of 2 hours of overtime;
- 12 Complete attention to the maintenance of hygienic conditions by the factory in the interest of the workers in order to get rid of the dirty work and of sacrificing health in the interest of the employers. For example, the establishment of a dining-hall with furniture; the provision of clean drinking vessels in all parts of the factory, so that 400 men should not be forced to drink from the same vessel as was the case then; provision of warm tea in one big tank, so that every worker could drink warm tea with sugar; the construction of a ventilation tube in the cleaning department so that dust and refuse could be vented.
- 13 Arrangement for the payment of wages so as not to be exposed to the vexations and vilifications of the pay-master Seyyed Moḥammad Taqī.

After written demands had been handed to the factory manager, the workers expected that their representatives would be invited by the director to discuss them.

During their rally in the Chahar Bagh, the police had

arrived, and they arrested some of the labour leaders. The Police Chief threatened the other workers and told them to return to work. A delegation of the workers then went to see the State Attorney, who told them that their accusations were unfounded.

On the second day of the strike, the strike committee held a meeting in which the written demands were finalised and prepared for a plenary meeting. In spite of the fact that the police and factory management tried to hinder their meeting, the next day the strikers assembled on the public road. In their public and plenary meeting, the demands were adopted and eight men elected as their representatives: (one party member, three union members, three unaffiliated). The eight representatives went to visit the director in his private home, who received them in a friendly manner. After having listened to their demands he said that he gave his word of honour that all these demands would be agreed to except the eight-hour day, which had to be at least nine hours. The party member among the strikers' representatives did not trust the director at all, and suggested that he give this promise in writing. Thereupon the director had the party member thrown out of his house. The others then also left the house. The director invited them back again saying that he had been serious about it. He took one of the representatives aside and tried to cajole and threaten him but, finally seeing that this did not work, told him that he would report his remarks to the workers. At the same time it was learned that the unaffiliated representatives had wavered. It was therefore decided to call a plenary meeting the next day or May 17. The workers believed the promises made by the director and returned to work.

On the afternoon of May 17 the workers stopped work after eight hours and went home. On the next day they saw armed policemen in the factory, who, when the workers had calmed down, in the afternoon arrested some of the leaders. In this way 25 to 39 workers were taken away by the police. Finally only six remained under arrest - all members of the action committee. Five of them were released after 50 days and one was banished for two months to Abadeh. He was apparently recognized as a CP member when his picture arrived in Tehran. He was then taken to Tehran, but succeeded in escaping.

The main results of the strike were:

- 1 The working day was reduced from twelve to nine hours;
- 2 The examination at the gate of the factory was abolished;
- 3 A separate area was set aside exclusively for drinking tea and for eating breakfast;
- 4 A pay rise of 20 per cent was promised;
- 5 The vilifications and the money fines had been lessened;
- 6 Vessels with iced water had been put in all departments;
- 7 The lunch-time had been changed from half an hour to one hour;
- 8 The main thing, however, was the withdrawal of the labour contract.

Although the CPI was very pleased with the outcome of the strike, at the same time it also analysed some of the defects in the organization and handling of the strike: not only had the strike committee neglected to contact other factories in Isfahan, but women and children working in the Vaṭan factory had not been allowed to join the strike either. The strike leaders were also criticized for concentrating on purely bread-and-butter issues and the total neglect of showing the people in Isfahan the links between their own position and the bond that existed between the Iranian government and international capitalism. The CPI ascribed these defects to the inexperience of the strike leaders, which also explained why they had not organized the strike after the Ghadr festival, in which case the strike would have been more effective, or so the CPI believed²²¹.

i) The suppression of the unions

After the Vaṭan strike of May 1931, there was hardly any further activity by unions. This had also become very difficult, for in June 1931 the Majles had adopted the anti-communist bill which, inter alia, forbade the formation of trade unions inter alia.

As a result of this law, more than 2,000 CPI or suspected CPI members were arrested. This had grave results for the activities of the unions, which, as we have seen, were in fact creations of the CPI. Another reason for the disappearance of

the unions was the fact that the Soviet Union preferred to remain on good terms with Iran and its ruler, Reza Shah. To that end it had already given orders to break off all contacts between the Russian Legation and the CPI in 1929. What contacts existed with Russia were mainly via the Comintern²²². A last reason for the lack of attraction of unions may have to do with the greater employment opportunities which existed in Iran after 1931 owing to the wave of industrialization. The small group of skilled workers, the main target and support of the unions in Iran, were in great demand²²³. Under the political circumstances, they may have decided to let things be for the moment.

Not all workers were of this opinion. It is reported that the workers of the northern section of the railway secretly formed a union in 1938²²⁴. But, even if this is true, it cannot change the fact that unionism as a political and social force played no role whatsoever during the 1930s. The few strikes that occurred during this period more than likely were 'wild-cat' strikes, such as the one in Shiraz in the factory of the Dekkan brothers in 1936. The workers demanded better treatment, to which the employers acceded²²⁵. A strike by railway workers in the North in 1932 for higher wages and continued pay for the strike period was also successful²²⁶. But these are the only ones reported during a period in which the industrial labour force increased by 250 per cent. In 1939 some militant APOC workers prepared a strike but, before this could materialize, their leaders were arrested and the danger of a strike averted²²⁷. It is therefore not surprising that the British could state in 1936 that there were no trade unions in Iran²²⁸.

5. The Reasons for the Failure of Unions in Iran

It would be wrong to conclude that the rise of the labour force in modern industry in the urban areas had led to the development of something like an industrial proletariat. The possible impact of industrial labour looks even more favourable for such a development when we look at the growth of large-scale factories with a big labour force (Table 4). As we can see, the relatively small number of factories with a labour force of more than 500 workers employed a disproportionate number of labourers. When we

TABLE 4: Growth of Large-Scale Factories and their Labour Force
1930-40(229)

No. of employees	1930		1940	
	factories	workers	factories	workers
3- 50	255	4 600	283	3 985
51- 500	17	6 400	67	11 030
501-1 000	-	-	17	14 862
1 001-2 000	-	-	11	15 068

further realize that the majority of these large-scale factories were concentrated in only four urban areas, such a supposition about the growth of a militant industrial proletariat seems likely. However, as far as is known, the only strike that occurred in those four urban areas of highly concentrated industrial activity (Tehran, Tabriz, Mazandaran, Isfahan) took place in Isfahan in 1931, that is to say before all these large-scale factories were built.

There are several reasons why no (militant) industrial labour class came into being during the 1930s additional to the inhibiting factor of the political context of Iranian society²³⁰.

The most important reason is, I submit, the fact that a considerable share of the industrial labour force had not been divorced from its traditional agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Especially in the agro-industries such as the eight sugar-mills, the fish and fruit-canning industry, the wool-cleaning and carding, and the cotton-ginning industry, the large majority of the labour force were seasonal workers. During off-season, these would be easily absorbed by the agricultural sector. A similar situation also existed for such an important sector as the construction industry, which during winter-time had to lay off a substantial part of its labour force²³¹. It is even true for the oil industry, where the turnover of wage-earners was very high. Even as late as 1948, for example, 59 per cent of the wage-earners leaving the APOC's employment had less than one year's service, and 28 per cent less than two years' service. This high turnover was caused by the fact that tribesmen wanted to earn some extra money in the off-season of the pastoral sector. Another reason was that unskilled workers dodged the draft by returning to their villages, where control was less effective

than in the urban areas²³²

Another obstacle to the formation of a proper industrial class was the prevalence of female and child labour, which was especially to be found in the textile industry. In Kerman, about 7,000 workers were employed in the carpet industry of which 75 per cent were children between six and twelve years and women. The remaining 25 per cent were almost exclusively composed of adolescents of fifteen to eighteen years. The older workers were the masters, mainly men, who numbered only a few hundred²³³. This pattern was only to be expected in an industry which was basically still a cottage industry. The same pattern also occurred in modern industry, here mainly in the textile industry. In Table 5 is shown the labour force in twelve cotton spinning mills. From this table it is clear that employers showed an increasing interest in child labour. Women and boys

TABLE 5: Workers in the Cotton Industry, by Sex²³⁴

Mills	March 1935			March 1936			March 1937		
	male	female	child	male	female	child	male	female	child
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	443	58	212
2	-	-	-	-	-	-	127	-	79
3	270	60	120	350	150	180	355	142	190
4	200	50	150	500	100	200	600	200	300
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	695	342	262
6	70	-	50	120	-	80	280	20	150
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	378	42	140
8	-	-	-	-	-	-	300	-	500
9	-	-	-	160	-	180	170	15	315
10	-	-	-	70	-	50	130	-	120
11	440	52	-	544	15	-	625	122	-
12	180	20	100	180	20	100	210	20	110
Total	1 160	182	400	1 924	285	790	4 313	961	2 378

received lower wages and were more amenable to the employers' wishes, although they only worked to obtain a little extra money for their families.

Another factor which inhibited the formation of a militant

working-class outlook among the labour force was its high rate of illiteracy. Of those employed by the APOC in 1935, only eight per cent were literate. The corresponding percentage in the other industries, with a high level of female and child labour, was undoubtedly even lower²³⁵. Although illiteracy in itself is no obstacle to acquiring a class consciousness in terms of a sense of belonging to an industrial proletariat, as events since 1945 have shown, this, combined with the others, was nevertheless an inhibiting factor.

Nevertheless, the beginnings of an industrial proletariat appeared towards the end of the 1930s. Although the second generation of industrial workers only started work in the various factories towards the end of the 1940s, something had already changed in employer-worker relations. The wave of new state and private modern factories, which often offered higher salaries than the traditional small-scale workshops, attracted many workers. The result was that "for an additional rial or two per day the factory worker has lost the personal association with his employer. There is not, as yet, adequate provision for injury or for unemployment to replace the moral responsibility of the old-type employer"²³⁶.

This situation was mitigated by the fact that, just as there was no true industrial population in Iran, neither were there old industrial families "with deep-rooted experience of industrial methods, organization and finance"²³⁷. Most of the new industrial employers had only five or six years of experience as industrial managers by 1941. They originated for the greater part, moreover, not from the old tradition of handicrafts and small-scale industry, but rather from trading and non-commercial families, or, as in the case of state factories, the managers were 'modernized' Iranians (military or civilian), with a totally different outlook on life and the future of Iran from that of labour force. Although the new class of managers treated their labour force in a paternalistic way, which was accepted and even expected by the workers, this attitude did not compensate for the moral responsibility felt by the traditional employers. The new managers were, with few exceptions, totally indifferent to the safety and health of their workers. "The employers feel somewhat outraged that such important persons as themselves should be

treated in this disrespectful way by mere workers. Their sole thought is money and more money....and they refuse to listen reasonably to the grievances of their workers and treat the latter in a hostile way when they try to submit complaints, which in many cases are genuine. The owners for the most part have no idea at all of how to deal with their men and no thought of maintaining good relations with them"²³⁸. It was this attitude of total indifference and aloofness that, more than anything, caused resentment among the Iranian workers. Similarly, the different treatment accorded to British and Iranian workers by the APOC, in short, discrimination, more than low wages and bad working conditions, created a fertile soil for the acceptance of union ideals in the 1940s. The lack of experience and isolation of the working class, which was still steeped in tradition and its own moral values, led to the failure of the trade union movement in Iran during the 1920s.

NOTES TO PART ONE

- 1 For an English translation of the Constitution of 1906 see Browne, 1909, 362. For an analysis of the constitutional movement of 1906-1909 see, for example, Abrahamian, 1982.
- 2 The data on the establishment of the first trade union in Iran are conflicting. Some sources give the year 1906, others give 1907, while both dates are quite possible ones. See e.g. Chaqueri, 1978, 7, 10, 78, 92, 97; Bashkirov, 1948, 24.
- 3 See for example, Abrahamian, 1982; Ha'eri, 1977, chapter one; Ravasani, n.d. chapter two.
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Abdullaev, 1963, 40; for a translation see Issawi, 1972, 50.
- 6 Ravasani, n.d. 128 ff.
- 7 Ibid
- 8 See note 3 above.
- 9 Malek, 1357/1978, 63 quoting Rabino, 1352/1973, 183.
- 10 Hezb-e Tudeh, 1349/1970, 183; On January 1, 1907 the fishermen still refused to come to terms with Liazonov or to hand over the fish called 'suf', Public Record Office, Great Britain, Foreign Office (FO) 248/906 (Resht local news), f.33. It has not been recorded when this dispute

- ended. (transcripts of Crown copy-right records in the PRO appear by permission of Her Majesty's Stationary Office).
- 11 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 173
- 12 Ibid; the number of striking telegraphists (1600) as given by this source is much too high
- 13 Malek, 1357/1978, 63; Rabino, in Roshan, 1352/1973, 13; The strike of the mainly Russian sailors probably ended at the end of April, for later it is not mentioned any more. While asking some reasonable concessions, they also asked impossible ones, according to Rabino, for "they ask that they should be engaged for 12 months in the year instead of for nine as at present and this notwithstanding that the port of Astrakhan is frozen in winter and that all shipping of the Caspian is stopped. They also require accommodation or quarters on board for the crew, an increase of their pay by 100% and a certain sum for their food. They also demand that Sundays and feasts should be regularly observed whether at sea or in port". In mid-April this strike had not yet ended a strike broke out amongst the Iranian "sailors who man the kerejis which are used as lighters to unload steamers which do not enter the harbour of Enzeli. They are claiming for an increase in the freight paid them. Their strike had so far been ineffective, as there has been scarcely any shipping of late owing to the strike at Baku" FO 248/906 "Resht local news", f.129-133
- 14 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 174
- 15 Malek, 1357/1978, 64 (quoting from Hablomatīn, 1, 84, 27 Jumadi al-Akhar 1325 Q)
- 16 Ibid., 6 (quoting from Hablomatīn, 1, 88, 2 Rajab 1325 Q)
- 17 Ibid., (quoting from Hablomatīn, 1, 129, 22 Sha'ban 1325 Q)
- 18 Revue du Monde Musulman (RMM), 1922, 52, 148
- 19 Ibid., 1908, 5, 167
- 20 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 174; Shidfar, 1339/1960, vol.1, 165; Ivanov. n.d., In the FO files there is, however, no evidence to be found at all of the existence of a union of carpet weavers. There is evidence to the contrary rather, see for example FO 248/1030, Kirman Diary (July 1911), f.157. There was, however, a union of cultivators of henna aiming to get fixed prices for their products, while at the

same time there was a union of buyers of henna, FO 248/906, Kirman Diary (September 1907), f.386; In Resht the servants formed a kind of servants' union to protect them from oppression at the hands of their employers. From the context it is clear, however, that these people also had political objectives, because they also wanted to join the local majles and started negotiations to come to a kind of compromise after having first been turned away, FO 248/906, "Resht local news" f.161

- 21 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 185
- 22 ibid., 184
- 23 Ravasani, n.d., 388-89
- 24 Abrahamian, 1982, 102f; Malekzādeh, 1325/1946, vol.4, 212; for the programmes of the progressive parties during the second Majles period see Manṣūrah Etteḥādīyeh 1361/1982
- 25 Shidfar, 1339/1960, vol.1, 165; Shāje'ī, 1344/1965, 184-189
- 26 Abrahamian, 1982, 130; FO 371/20830, f.184 "A Memorandum on Economic Affairs in Azerbaijan" (31 December 1936); Bahar, 1358/1979 (reprint), 139 states "socialist ideas can but fall on barren ground in a backward environment such as Iran where there are no industrial capitalists, no industrial enterprises, and thus no industrial workers".
- 27 Many Russians were working in the fisheries industry, the timber mills and in shipping. An example of the influence of Russian labour relations on the Iranian situation has been given in note 13 above
- 28 FO 371/950, 'Monthly Summary', f.373
- 29 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 185; Hūshyār 1330/1951, 51; according to the Times (July 19, 1910, 7) the general strike of all printers in Tehran took place on June 26. Its journalist reported "evidently rumours had got abroad that the printers had been paid to strike by persons in authority desirous of extinguishing the regular newspapers, for the authors of the new venture (i.e. the paper Ettefāq-e Kārgarān) took care to base their action on economic grounds. They published a list of demands which throw an instructive light upon the relations between employers and workmen, and it is probably not too much to say that such a document is unique in this country".

- 30 Ibid., (English text); for the Persian text see Chaqueri, 1359/1980, 117 f. with a fascimile of the first page of the first issue of Ettefāq-e Kārgarān
- 31 See notes 29 and 30 above
- 32 Bashkirov, 1948, 24
- 33 On this period see Abrahamian, 1982, 102-111
- 34 FO 248/1072, Kirman Diary, f.62, 68
- 35 Ibid., f.222, 256
- 36 Lenczowski, 1968, 10
- 37 Ravasani, n.d., 248 ff; the 'Adalat party was not the only progressive party that undertook action in Iran, apart from another group mentioned, Ibid., 246 (note 1) there was also a Ferqeh-ye Sosiyaīst-e Irān in Qazvin. For a copy of its programme see FO 248/1259, 'maramnameh', May 1919
- 38 Chaqueri, 1978, 7, 20
- 39 Ossetrov, 1922, 574
- 40 Ibid.,
- 41 Chaqueri, 1978, 7, 20, 86
- 42 Ossetrov, 1922, 575 (partly translated by Ravasani, n.d., 228)
- 43 Ossetrov, 1922, 5755 (22 union members in Tehran; however, nationally there were allegedly 2000 members, Ravasani, n.d., 227)
- 44 Chaqueri, 1978, 86; these other groups were formed by construction workers, tramway functionaries and others
- 45 On his career see Abrahamian, 1982, 127-28; see also FO 416/79, f.94 for a short biographical note
- 46 As Lenczowski remarks, "the Anglo-Iranian Treaty of 1919 was denounced by practically everybody in Iran, and the prevailing climate in politics was decidedly anti-British", 100
- 48 Ibid., 7, 11, 13, 16, 76, 88, 97; the labour force, however, was much bigger at that time, see Bharier, 1971, 34
- 49 Table 1 is based on Chaqueri, 1978, 83,, see however, 93. For 1926 see Ibid., 94; see also Ossetrov, 1922, 57; and FO 371/9027, The Ishtamayun Party, f.176, which states 1,350 artisans and workmen were members of the Socialist party and organized into several unions: Union of Printers,

strength 300, president Jehangir/Union of Editors, strength 40, president Nasir Saif/Union of Masons, strength 200, president Hussein Mehmar (sic)/Union of Bath Attendants, strength 100, president Ustad Hussein/Union of Bootmakers, strength 200, president Abdul Karim/Union of Tenants, strength 510, president Farokhi (editor of the extremist newspaper Tofan). The data show how unreliable these figures are, for in many cases they do not agree with one another.

- 50 Mānī, 1325/1946, 9; partly reprinted in Taban, 1974, vol.1, 159f
- 51 ibid., 9 f; he also mentions the names of the representatives of the various unions. According to Chaqueri, 1978, 75, the important group of bakers was not affiliated with the Central Council, because it was not a proper union, being a religious kind of organisation. Lambton, 1954, 23 also states that the Shāteran-e nānvā (a section of the bakers' guild) may have retained a religious character. Could it be one of the last vestiges of a futuvvat association? On this issue see Floor, 1984a, 106-114
- 52 Mānī, 1325/1946, 11; FO 416/73, Intelligence Summary nr.29, July 21, 1923, f. "The Union of Workmen in Tehran has opened an office in the city. On the door is the inscription: Proletarians of all nations unite, with the Soviet crest of the hammer and sickle etc., above it Meetings are held every evening about how to boycott English goods in the best way"
- 53 For particulars about Dehqān see Mānī, 1325/1946, 18 and Abrahamian, 132, 1982
- 54 Zabih, 1977, 50
- 55 Chaqueri, vol 1, Ovanessiyān, 1974, 119-140, 114 in particular; A similar observation is made by Lāhūtī, n.d., 2f. Abrahamian's statement, 1982, (119 n.39) "although this book is a forgery - probably by the police" is not substantiated by a shred of evidence. Lāhūtī's book is borne out in most of his observations by other Communist authors such as Ovanessiyāh mentioned in this note. It is therefore not surprising that Abrahamian ends his note with the (contra-

dictory) statement "it provides interesting information on the revolt and the communist movement in exile".

- 56 Zabih, 1977, 50
- 57 Lāhūtī, n.d. 22; this observation is e.g. borne out by an analysis of the contents of these newspapers, Fatemi, 1952, 280-92; see also Lenczowski, 1968, 98
- 58 Lāhūtī, n.d. 22; Ovanessiyan, (note 56) 134; Ḥaqīqat was founded on December 30, 1921. It identified itself as a Socialist (ejtemā'ī) newspaper and as a supporter of the toilers (ranjbarān) and the trade unions, whose Central Council had been created in November 1921. The paper also printed at the top right-hand of each issue "Workers of the World Unite". For this newspaper see Chaqueri, 1974-1978, vol. 7, 49 re-issues of Ḥaqīqat newspaper.
- 59 The CPI also published Peikār in Resht, Naṣīḥat in Qazvin, Sedā-ye Sharq in Mashhad, Faryād-e Kārgarān in Tabriz and Engelāb-e sorkh in Tehran.
- 60 The following papers supported Soleimān Mīrzā, leader of the Socialist Party, and therefore received subsidies from the Russian Legation in Tehran: Peikār, editor Moḥammad Vožūq-e Homāyūn 125 tomans per month, Kār editor Abolfāzel Lesānī, 150 tomans per month. Kūshesh editor Shokrollāh Soīrī, 100 tomans per month, Bahāristan Noubakht, 100 tomans per month, Shafaq-e Sorkh editor 'Alī Dashfī, 200 tomans per month, see FO 371/9027, f 176-77. It goes without saying that the British financed their own newspapers and men of straw, a methodology which still has not lost its value in today's ideological warfare. On British activities see Waterfield, 1973, 71
- 61 FO 416/70, Intelligence Summary nr. 4, January 18, 1922, "The military attache Colonel Rogachef is of the opinion that the time has not come for this, but the other members of the Yarcheika (cell) committee considered it feasible and recommended a commencement".
- 62 Moḥammad Khān was "employed on the staff of the Ḥaqīqat newspaper. Formerly a Major in the Gendarmerie and served with the Germans in South Persia. He is close friends with Sohrab Zadeh Mudabbir ul Mulk who is a professional agitator ready to join any party for a consideration.

Meetings of the Central Committee (of the union) take place once a week at the office of the Iran press. Each member pays a contribution of 3 tomans a month". FO 371/7809, Saunders to Minister, 28 February 1922 (secret).

- 63 Ibid.
- 64 FO 371/7828, Intelligence Summary nr. 36, September 9, 1922, f "in accordance with the decision of Shumyatski and Apin",
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 FO 416/70, Intelligence Summary nr. 7, February 18, 1922, f. "as part of the scheme for spreading the communist doctrine".
- 67 FO.416/72, Intelligence Summary nr. 33, August 19, 1922, f.145 "he is a trained Bolshevik propagandist"; see also Ibid., IS 15, April 14, 1923, which mentions the start of a club of workmen by an Armenian communist committee at the orders of the Russian legation.
- 68 Lāhūtī, n.d., 21
- 69 Ibid., see also Abrahamian, 1982, 131-32 for an analysis of the political situation at that time
- 70 "We do not yet have workers in Iran. Everyone is an employer. If God so desires, and our country becomes important, and trade and agriculture commence, and factories are founded, at that time a labour-employer law will be produced. However, at the moment we have neither workers nor factories or railroads for which to have workers", Majles, 1924, 424; see also note 26
- See also "La Politique du gouvernement des soviets en Perse", in: Revue du Monde Musulman, 1922, 150 and Floor, 1984b; For a reply by Ḥaqīqat see below note 76
- 71 Ossetrov, 1922, 578; Mānī, 1325/1946, 18 states that Reza Khan had established the unions of the five (low-class) quarters (maḥalleh) to attack the newspaper Ḥaqīqat and the workers' unions. These other 'unions' were composed of oubāsh (ruffians). On p 18 Mānī, however, states that Moderres had organized these ruffian-'unions', which is not unlikely in view of the good relationship which he had with Reza Khan and Noṣratoddouleh as well as with the city ruffians. On the use of the oubāsh as a political weapon

- see: Floor, 1981, 83-95; for another example see note 124
- 72 Ossetrov, 1922, 578
- 73 According to Mānī, 1325/1946, 18, Modarres induced the hooligans of Tehran to attack the Haqīqat office in Lālehzār street
- 74 Revue du Monde Musulman, 1922, 150; Haqīqat, nr. 59
- 75 Reply by Haqīqat (nr.2 January 1, 1922) to Seyyed Ya'qūb Anvar Ardekānī (see note 71)
- 76 See on this matter Haqīqat, nrs. 51, 69 and 83; also Chaqueri, 1978, 23, reproducing an article by Soltanzadeh which is probably the source for Ladjevardi's mistake of stating that Molitor was a Swede, see Ladjevardi, 1981, 75. Haqīqat nr 2 (January 1, 1922) states "foreign personnel forced the government to dissolve the union of postal workers and the Majlis, the same Majlis for whose establishment these same workers gave thousands of sacrifices does not raise a voice against the violation of one of the principles of the constitution". A union of dismissed finance officials was organised in Tehran about the 1st June 1923. They had been recently dismissed by Millspaugh on reduction of staff and numbered about one hundred, FO 416/73, IS nr. 22
- 77 Mānī, 1325/1946, 8; for the announcement of the creation of this union see Haqīqat nr. 76 (May 12, 1922)
- 78 Mānī, 1325/1946, 8; Haqīqat nr. 69 (April 30, 1922)
- 79 Chaqueri, 1978, 7-9
- 80 Ibid., 22, 94; FO 416/70, Intelligence Summary nr. 34, December 24, 1923; Hadow, 1925, "Pay was until recently, often seriously in arrears"; Lenczowski, 1968, 66
- 81 Haqīqat nrs. 63 (April 22, 1922) and nr. 78 (May 15, 1922)
- 82 Dehqān for example translated Marx and Engels into Persian, Mānī, 1325/1946, 18
- 83 See above note 21
- 84 Mānī, 1325/1946, 16
- 85 Ibid., see also note 22, above
- 86 Ossetrov, 1922, 576
- 87 FO 416/73, Intelligence Summary nr.39, September 29, 1923, f.229
- 88 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 137; they also formed football (soccer) teams

- 89 Haqīqat nr. 55 (April 5, 1922) and advertisement for the play 'Kaveh Ahangar', Haqīqat nr.63 (April 20, 1922) 'Nadir Shah Afshar', and Haqīqat nr.69, (April 30, 1922, a comedy.
- 90 Chaqueri, 1359/1980, 120
- 91 FO 416/72, Intelligence Summary nr. 24, June 17, 1922, f.72
- 92 FO 371/13783, f.85 "20 per cent are said to be Russian subjects, leading spirit is Keshawarz, Munshi Bashi of the Russian Consulate"; see also FO 461/72, IS nr. 10, March 10, 1923
- 93 Kāmbakhsh, 1972, 30
- 94 See note 91; Ovanessyan, 1974, 131
- 95 See note 91 which has full text of the invitation for the May 1 celebration. The Hanchak party was an Armenian Communist party founded in 1887 in Geneva. In reaction, conservative nationalist groups established the Dashnak party in 1890
- 96 FO 416/72 Intelligence Summary nr.18, May 5, 1922, f.15
- 97 Chaqueri, 1978, 83, 93; Ovanessyan, 1974, 135
- 98 See on this issue, for example, FO 371/9020
- 99 FO 416/73, Intelligence Summary nr.28, July 14, 1923, f.84; for other similar examples see note 93 and ch.4 note 4
- 100 Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.44, November 3, 1923, f.4; Intelligence Summary nr.48, December 1, 1923, f.20 "The 'Workmen's Union had a banner stretched across the street inscribed 'Union will enable us to oppose English tyranny'. As instructed by the Comintern, the CPI had "to do everything in their power to assist in boycotting British goods in Persia, Arabia, and Mesopotamia. It was also decided to set up a Committee of Action in Tehran with the indirect assistance of the Soviet Delegation", see FO 371/9026, f.110
- 101 FO 461/73, Intelligence Summary nr.46 November 17, 1923, f.8
- 102 Lāhūtī, n.d. 23; Rezun, 1981, 44 f.; Haqīqat nr.78, May 12, 1922 used the following arguments for supporting Reza Khan "because he is not from their class and has no peasants or estates or titles. For him it makes no difference if the upper classes profit or incur a loss. The upper classes cannot accept or tolerate a non-artistocrat gaining influence in a ministerial post". The CPI still hoped that

- this earlier assessment was the right one, and wholeheartedly supported his flirtation with the republican idea.
- 103 Lāhūtī, n.d. 40; see for the Soviet-CPI analysis for this policy, Rezun, 1981, 44 f, 268-69; Zabih, 1977, 51-54
- 104 Chaqueri, 1978, 94
- 105 Ibid.,
- 106 Ha'eri, 1977, 142 f.
- 107 Chaqueri, 1978, 83, 93; Ovanessyan, 1974, 130
- 108 Ossetrov, 1922, 576; see also Abrahamian, 1982, 130
- 109 Mānī, 1325/1946, 15
- 110 Ovanessyan, 1914, 135
- 111 Revue du Monde Musulman, 1922; Ossetrov, 1922, 576
- 112 FO 416/72, Intelligence Summary nr. 46, November 18, 1922
- 113 Chaqueri, 1978, 10
- 114 Ovanessyan, 1974, 135
- 115 For the complete text see Chaqueri, 1359/1980, 126. The organisation, or at least the attempt, of the unemployed workers is another indication that labour organizers did their utmost to rally any possible support for their (political) cause
- 116 FO 416/74, Intelligence Summary nr. 9, March 1, 1924, f.125 "Object of the committee is socialist propaganda" the British commented
- 117 Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.19, May 10, 1924, f.8
- 118 Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.50, December 13, 1924, f.24
- 119 See note 57 above; FO 371/13783; for the published text see Chaqueri, 1979a (M53), 283
- 120 FO 416/76, Intelligence Summary nr.7, February 14, 1925, f.67
- 121 FO 416/78, Intelligence Summary, December 12, 1925, f.12
- 122 Chaqueri, 1978, 7, 8
- 123 Ibid., according to Ossetrov, 1922, 576, its membership amounted to 800 only; according to Haqīqat nr.15, January 1922, it was not a proper union and it had been organized by Mokhberessaltāneh to pre-empt activities by the progressive forces
- 124 Chaqueri, 1978, 78

- 125 In a British report on political parties in Tabriz during the period prior to the revolt, no mention is made of the "Workers Party", see FO 248/1278
- 126 Haqiqat, nr.49, March 29, 1922
- 127 FO 371/7823, Bristow to Lorraine, Tabriz, June 20, 1922, f
- 128 FO 416/77, Intelligence Summary, October 22, 1925, f.174
Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.5, June 13, 1925, f.6
- 129 FO 371/7821, Mashad Diary nr.10, March 11, 1922, f.58
"there was a discussion as to the cause of the present failure of the revolutionary movement in Khorasan. It was suggested that the name and aims of the party were too 'advanced' for the present...and it was decided to change the name to 'Ranjbaran (workmen's) Party' and to moderate their programme. The Russian Consul-General is said to have approved of the change". For a translation of the Manifesto of the Ranjbaran Party see Ibid.
- 130 FO 371/9034, Mashad Diary, f.173. At that time there was also a traders' union in Mashad, Ibid., f.195
- 131 FO 371/9035, Mashad Diary, f.46, 117. The Address concluded with "Long live Islam and its preachers. Death and destruction to the enemies of Islam. Long live the workman class of Islam"
- 132 FO 371/9026, Prideaux to Lorraine, Mashad, September 12, 1923, and FO 371/9035, f.181, see also f. 110 and FO 371/9035, f.120
- 133 FO 416/76, Intelligence Summary nr.2, January 10, 1925, f.33. This is another indication that middle-class elements lead the labour movement
- 134 Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.5, January 31, 1925, f.55
- 135 Ossetrov, 1922, 576
- 136 FO 371/7836, Confidential Summary Persian Gulf, July 1922, f. See also the speech by CG Tombakov in Shiraz on May 1, 1923 in which he alluded to the power of labour, FO 371/9026, f.81-87
- 137 Bharier, 1971, 150 ff; Ferrier, 1982
- 138 Ibid., Ellwell-Sutton, 1955
- 139 Wilson, 1942, 53; the system of hiring workgangs headed by a foreman (sarkar) existed prior to the APOC operations in Khuzestan, see e.g. Morgan, 1905, 40 referring to the

- situation at the end of the 19th century. The contract labour employed by the APOC in the 1930s were still hired on the same basis, Elwell-Sutton, 1955
- 140 Wilson, 1942, 140, "Food is so cheap that the Oil Company must, paradoxically, pay higher wages to get the people to work at all. Men's needs are few and they are 'lazy' - in other words their standard of living includes a large element of leisure, and who shall blame them?" (1910-Shush area)
- 141 Chaqueri, 1978, 26-27 (quoting Setāreh-ye Sorkh)
- 142 Ibid., 41 (quoting Peikār); Ferrier, 1982, 432
- 143 FO 371/7819; these are published in Chaqueri, 1978, 196-98. On pages 199-200 is a breakdown of the composition of the labour force employed by the APOC(AIOC) at that time
- 144 FO 371/7819, E.G.B. Peel to Trevor, Ahvaz, ff.220
- 145 See statistics in Ferrier, 1982, Table 10.1
- 146 On the hospital and hygienic situation in the Abadan area see: Williamson, 1927, 128 ff.
- 147 See note 107 above f. 221
- 148 Ibid., f.220
- 149 FO 371/7836, Intelligence Summary Persian Gulf, March 23, 1922, the ships were the SS Barjara and the SS Varela
- 150 FO 416/72, Intelligence Summary nr.20, July 22, 1922, f.132 which perhaps refers to the arrival of Fīshevarī and Rezā Rūstā, see Lāhūtī, 21
- 151 Ibid., 45
- 152 FO 416/75, Intelligence Summary nr.16, April 19, 1924, f.5; Ferrier, 1982, 433, and Table 10.1
- 153 FO 416/76, Intelligence Summary, nr.3, January 17, 1925, f.43
- 154 Ibid., Intelligence Summary nr.8, February 8, 1925, f.77. This information was based on "an unconfirmed, but fairly reliable source"
- 155 Doulatābādī, 1325/1946, vol.2, 116; Revue du Monde Musulman, 1907, 554; Lambton 1954, 29; The Russian Consul-General Tardov commented that the trade union movement in Iran was permeated by the petty bourgeois ideology of the narrow guild group, and that this form of organisation turned out to be entirely antiquated and faced a period of

- turned out to be entirely antiquated and faced a period of disintegration. He believed that stratification would become more and more visible among the artisans, Lenczowski, 1968, 102; A report to the Comintern also stated that "trade unions in the real sense of the word hardly exist; the majority of the unions are more on guild lines", Chaqueri, 1979b, 1113 report to the VI. Comintern Congress 1928)
- 156 Ossetrov, 1922, 571; partly translated by Ravasani, n.d., 227-28
- 157 Haqīqat, nr.66, April 24, 1922 and nr. 83, May 25, 1922
- 158 Chaqueri, 1978, 95, 99, 104-5 (resolution IV. Profintern Congress)
- 159 Abrahamian, 1982, 138-39 on his policy; Chaqueri, 1979b, 1114
- 160 Lāhūtī, n.d. 44; Ovanessiyan, 1974, 130
- 161 Lāhūtī, n.d. 22
- 162 FO 416/79, Intelligence Summary nr. 23, November 13, 1926, f.200
- 163 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 130
- 164 Mānī, 1325/1946, 21-23; Ovanessiyan, 1974, 130
- 165 Ibid.,
- 166 Mānī, 1325/1946, 21
- 167 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 130; Zabih, 1977, 53
- 168 Lāhūtī, n.d. 44; Ovanessiyan, 1974, 130
- 169 Chaqueri, 1978, 102-104
- 170 On Ağabekov see Rezun, 1981, 94-113 and 171-82
- 171 FO 416/82, Intelligence Summary nr.6, March 17, 1928, f.193
- 172 Ibid., Intelligence Summary, nr.7, March 31, 1928, f.203
- 173 Ibid., Intelligence Summary, nr.11, May 16, 1928, f.341; according to the CPI this was only a pretext to silence opposition forces in connection with the approaching elections for the Majles, Chaqueri, 1978, 104 (citing Inprekorr. nr. 57, June 15, 1928, 1937); on this matter see also Zabih, 1977, 61
- 174 Lāhūtī, n.d. 54-55; for the reasons for this political line and the differences between the CPI and the Soviet Union see Rezun, 1981, 268 f.

- 175 Mānī, 1324/1946, 22 f., Lahuti, n.d. 55 mentions that the leaders of the union of sweepers, the tobacco workers' union, the weavers' union, and the mercers' union were also arrested as well as Pīshevarī; Ovanessiyan, 1974, 136
- 176 Mānī, 1324/1946, 24 f; For a statement by the Comintern on this case see Chaqueri, 1978, 24-25 (Setāreh-ye Sorkh)
- 177 Mānī, 1325/1946, 24
- 178 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 138
- 179 Rezun, 1981, 122
- 180 FO 416/83, Intelligence Summary, nr.18, September 1, 1928, f.115; *ibid.*, nr.19, September 15, 1928; *ibid.*, nr.22, November 3, 1928, f.196; FO 371/13783 (1929), Finch, vice-consul at Resht to Clive, February 5, 1929, f.83 "the instrument for disseminating communist influence has been the porters' union"
- 181 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 188
- 182 FO 416/84, Intelligence Summary, nr.9, May 4 1929, f.256
- 183 FO 416/85, Report on the General Situation in the Caspian Provinces, July 1939, f.60-61; The school referred to may be the same as the one mentioned half a year earlier, when the British consul mentioned the opening of a school by the Russians in the fisheries at Enzeli for the free education of the children of Iranian employees, who were asked to subscribe five per cent of their wages for the maintenance of the school, FO 416/80. Intelligence Summary, nr.1, January 8, 1927, f.34
- 184 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 138
- 185 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 189
- 186 Bashkirov, 1948, 28; Ovanessiyan, 1974, 139
- 187 *ibid.*, 115-120, 137
- 188 Chaqueri, 1978, 15 (text from Setareh-ye Sorkh)
- 189 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 115
- 190 Ivanov, 1356/1977, 81
- 191 Ovanessiyan, 1974, 138
- 192 Anon, 1973, 120; Chaqueri, 1978, 82 reproduces a Profintern report that this union of APOC workers had presented a report on their working conditions to the Majles in 1926. Another Profintern report, *ibid.*, 97-98 states that this was repeated in 1927. However, a

- Comintern report of 1928 states that there was no union of the oil workers, see Chaqueri, 1979, 1116
- 193 Chaqueri, 1978, 97-90; N.N., 1973, 120
- 194 Lāhūtī, n.d. 45
- 195 Chaqueri, 1978, 26-27, 41
- 196 Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 188; N.N., 1973, 120
- 197 Ferrier, 1982, Table 19.1 and Table 7.2 On p.154, Table 4.1 Ferrier produces different figures for the year 1910/11
- 198 Rezun, 1981, 158-59, 287-88 is totally uncritical and off-the-mark as to the 1929 events. The 1929 strike did not even merit enough significance to be mentioned in the Annual Report by the British embassy in Tehran
- 199 Chaqueri, 1978, 52-53
- 200 Ibid.,
- 201 Ibid.,
- 202 FO 371/13783, unsigned and secret letter to M, Abadan, May 2 1929, f.130-34. This letter is reproduced in Chaqueri, 1978, 215-17. The British, also reported that "no labourers have been hitherto admitted into the organisation which is confined at present almost entirely to clerks, foremen, and artisans, all of Persian nationality. They wanted to increase their numbers and its funds by subscription until they feel strong enough to challenge the APOC and the government"
- 203 Chaqueri, 1978, 216; N.N., 1973, 120. In the FO files no information is available on these arrests. Unfortunately the British Petroleum archives are as yet closed to researchers. It is BP's intention to make these available to bonafide scholars (it sounds rather restrictive!) after Ferrier has finished his writing of BP's history. Ferrier, in his second volume of his History of BP, will deal with these labour matters and hopefully will shed light on these questions, Ferrier, 1982, XXI, 432; the alleged pre-emptive arrests may have been caused by the experience of the strike which reportedly occurred in 1928 in Naseri, as a result of which 66 workers had been dismissed, Chaqueri, 1978, 26, 28. According to another report a similar strike occurred in 1927 in the oil fields, Chaqueri, 1979b, 1114.

- For the list of demands see Chaqueri, 1978, 216 reproducing FO 371/13783, f.133
- 204 The apprehension increased when it became known that two other Russian ships SS 'Loos', and SS 'Kommunist' would also shortly arrive at Abadan. The Iranian authorities, at the behest of the British government and in order to quell the unrest and tension in the area, ordered the Russian ships to leave Iranian waters
- 205 FO 371/13783, f.130-34; *Ibid.*, "Bolshevist Activities at Abadan, May 4, 1929, f.171-72
- 206 *Ibid.*, f.179-181 (May 8, 1929)
- 207 FO 371/13784, Fletcher to Barrett, Mohammareh, June 1, 1929 f.37; On May 26 and 28 disturbances at the Uhlan Company near Ahvaz occurred. Two workers refused their pay on the grounds that it was insufficient. The manager, after having contacted the Governor-General, refused to grant any increase. On May 28 "a band of some 20 Persians prevented the other workmen from going to work. The police intervened and some 20 to 30 men were arrested. Since the Uhlan Company is employed by the government in a government scheme this demonstration ipso facto is aimed against the government. Fletcher stated that the tactics employed on May 6 and 28 were similar, which indicated that they originated from the same source, FO 416/821 Fletcher to Barrett, Mohammareh, June 1, 1929, f.171
- 208 See note 208, f. 181-85. According to CPI literature 10,000 to 20,000 people participated in the strike and the confrontation with the army and the police. As a result of this the production of oil even (temporarily) decreased. However, this is not borne out at all by the British documents. Kāmbakhsh, 1972, 36; Chaqueri, 1978, 54; Abrahamian, 1982, 162
- 209 *Ibid.*, SNO to Admiralty, May 26, 1929, f.200; for a list of the cell leaders see Chaqueri, 1978, 218, see also p.106 (Rundschau Basel) where the names of "Yusif Fftekhari, Rahim, Ali, Ata Abdulaev, Ardashir (Ovanessiyan?), and Pischevari" are given as the leaders of the Abadan strike. Timurtash, the Minister of Court, telegraphed orders on May 5 to take drastic measures and

- to deport the ringleaders of the strike, FO 371/13783, telegram to Clive, May 5, 1929, f.107. This is one of the telegrams not reproduced by Chaqueri, 1978, 109; it is also noteworthy that "so far the Indians have remained unaffected, the Arabs too appear to have remained untouched"! FO 371/13783, f.37
- 210 FO 371/13783, telegram May 10, 1929, f.127
- 211 FO 371/13784, Fletcher to Barrett, Mohammerah, June 1, 1929, f.36
- 212 For more background information on Mīrzā Hosein Germānī (due to his pro-German sympathies during WW I) Movaqer see Shajē'i, 1344/1965
- 213 The allegation about British warships putting down the Abadan strike is utterly unfounded, since it is nonsensical. The ship stayed out of sight and at no time during the period under discussion was it seen by the local population. Its presence only became known, both to the Iranian government and the CPI, from reading the British press
- 214 See note 53, f.37
- 215 Ibid., and Clive to Chamberlain, Tehran, June 1929, f.16-17
- 216 FO 416/85, Fletcher to Clive, June 10, 1929, f.22; Ibid., Fletcher to Henderson, July 27, 1929, f.50; FO 371/13784 telegrams June 8 and 9, 1929, f.9
- 217 It is interesting to note that Chaqueri, 1978, 218f, was rather selective in his choice of material and did not reproduce any material casting light upon the rather insignificant occurrences of May 1929. He did not indicate either that he only reproduced part of the material and had left out the telegrams dated May 5, 6 and 7, 1929, see FO 371/13783, f.103, 105, 107
- 218 FO 371/13784, SNO to CIC Fast India Station, July 1, 1929, f.129.
- 219 Ibid., June 30, 1929, f.126
- 220 Lāhūtī, n.d. 56; It may also be possible that the demonstration was indeed engineered by local notables such as Movaqer with the silent consent of Tehran. Both Barrett and the SND in the Gulf considered this a serious possibility. For "peaceful strikes with the object of

- increasing wages, reducing the number of foreigners employed and increasing Persian influence in the firm were to be expected and it is not impossible that such strikes will have the secret support of the Central Government" FO 371/13784, f.126; see also ibid., Clive to Chamberlain, June 1, 1929 f.16 "I had the impression that Movaqer enjoyed protection in the highest quarters, and there is no doubt that this is so!"; For the Annual Report see FO 416/112 (1929)
- 221 The story of the Vaṭān strike is based on letters in the Persian paper Sefāreh-ye Sorkh (published in Germany), which is reproduced (in translation) in Chaqueri, 1978, 43-47, 63-66
- 222 Abrahamian, 1982, 139 f.162; Rezun, 1981, 293 ff
- 223 Simmonds, 1935, p.37. This was a great change as compared with the situation in the 1920s, when unemployment for unskilled labour was reported to be as high as 50% and for skilled labour as high as 20%, Chaqueri, 1978, 75, 90
- 224 Ivanov, 1356/1977, 82; Bashkirov, 1948 28-29
- 225 FO 371/20835, f.21 (Report on Economic Conditions in Fars 1936)
- 226 Bashkirov, 1948, 29; Hezb-e Tūdeh, 1349/1970, 189
- 227 ibid., 190
- 228 FO 371/20830, f.184 (A Memorandum on Economic Affairs in Azerbaijan 1936).
- 229 Abdullayev, 1968, 89
- 230 Abrahamian, 1982, 132-65
- 231 Floor, 1984b; Bharier, 1971, 71ff
- 232 ILO, 1950, 24-25; employers also dismissed older, militant workers for younger and cheaper ones, who also were less militant. Caqueri, 178, 14
- 233 ILO, 1938, 89
234. ibid., 87
- 235 ILO, 1950, 42; added to the relative isolation of the towns this resulted in a rather low class consciousness, Chaqueri, 1978, 76
- 236 See note 70 above
- 237 ILO, 1950, 66; Conolly, 1935; Korby, 1977, 20-23; Anon, 1946, 311 "the men who have emerged as the directors and

owners of these mills come from the merchants class"; The above is also confirmed by the names of the most important shareholders/directors of the factories in Isfahan and Shiraz.

In Isfahan the following factories existed in 1936:

Vatan: Hajj Muhammad Husain Kaziruni (eight heirs).

Risbaf: Hajj Abbas Akbari, Haider Ali Immami, Hajj Sayyid Javad Kasai, Hajj Muhammad Kazim Mithqali, Ali Almasi

Zayandarud: Hajj Sayyid Abdul Rahim Mahmudiya, Hajj Zainul Abidin Amin, Muhammad Ja'far Kaziruni

Ata al Mulk: Fazlullah Dehesh Ata al-Mulk

Nakhtab: Ishaq Sassoon, Eliahu Derlian, Qasim Rasti, Azizullah Maghen, Azizullah Shekib (mostly Jewish).

Chit: mainly the same as of Risbaf, Zayandarud and the Kaziruni family.

Shahreza: Hajj Sayyid Mustaffa Bunakdar, Hajj Hasan Ali Hamadani, Hajj Muhammad 'Ali Sahaban, Muhammad Javad Nilfurush.

Rughani & Cy: Hajj Rughani Rahimzada (+ son, 70% of the shares)

Pashm: Muhammad Herati, Ali Agha Hamadani, Hajj 'Abdul Husain Akhavan Dehdashti, Hajj Hasan Vaffadar.

Kaghaz: Akbar Mas'ud Saram ud-Dawla Hasan Sultani, Javad Kasai, Zainul Abidin Amin, Muhammad Shaikhzada, Sayyid Muhammad aAfzal, Martin Fssai.

Ittihad Shahrez: Many shareholders.

Kanva: Martin Essai, Miles Essai, Muhammad 'Ali Sahiban (mainly Armenian),

FO 371/20050, f.137-43 (Report on Economic Conditions).

In Shiraz the following situation existed:

"Fars Electric Comp. & Sharikat-i sanayi'-yi dasti:

Abdul Husain Dehqan, Ali Muhammad Dehqan (Majlis deputy), Mehdi Namazi (Majlis deputy), Jalal Aryan, Hajj Muhammad Hasan Bihbahani.

Nassaji-yi Fars: Hajj Muhammad Hasan Bihbahani, Abdul Husain Dehqan, 'Ali Muhammad Dehqan, Jalal Aryan, Mehdi Namazi, Muhammad Taqi Shenkai."

FO 371/402222, f.79-80 (Labour and Industrial Conditions in Fars).

238. FO 371.40222, Bullard to Eden, Tehran, March 9, 1944; see also note 67, f.75 80

Part II. LABOUR LAW

a) Introduction

The whole area of social legislation was neglected by the Iranian Government. Although, as we shall see, some legislation was adopted with regard to the prevention of accidents and of industrial diseases, it was insignificant compared with the lack of attention paid to such matters in practice, and the lack of government enforcement of these laws. Surprisingly, even the workers neglected these issues, and did not go beyond demanding payment of compensation after an accident or illness¹ rather than fighting for the adoption of preventive measures as well.

We can distinguish three distinct periods between 1900 and 1941 with regard to labour legislation. The first period was that prior to 1921. During this time Iran boasted hardly any modern industry and was beset by political and economic problems. The central government, after 1911, held no power over the provinces. It is therefore not surprising to observe that, apart from an ineffectual and minor attempt at labour force regulation in 1904, little was done during that period. Only in Kerman was some effort made to regulate working conditions in the carpet industry. Owing principally to self-interested objectives of its proponent, the whole effort came to nought, however.

The second period (1921-1929) is characterized by Iran's efforts to become a modernizing state. After the 1921 coup, led by Reza Shah, various social reforms were proposed. Apart from being unrealistic from an economic point of view, these were also politically unattainable, and thus soon shelved. The discussion in the Majles of the need for a Factory Act underscored this lack of political support for such a step. Iran was not yet ready for it, socially, economically and institutionally. Nevertheless, Iran had joined the ILO in 1914, and it was by this organization that the issue of labour conditions in Iran was raised. The ILO's enquiry remained restricted to the carpet industry, which to the outside world was Iran's principal, if not sole, industry. As a result of this ILO activity, the first labour law in Iran was passed, although it only applied to one industrial sector (the carpet industry), and to one area (Kerman). After its publication in the ILO legislative text, everybody's mind was set

at ease, and no further interest was shown in its implementation.

The third period coincides with Iran's large-scale efforts at industrialization in the 1930s. The majority of the legislation was aimed at the modern sector of the economy, with particular emphasis on state functionaries. The small-scale industry sector, such as the carpet industry, was not regulated at all, maybe because of its increasing economic importance.

Although social legislation gave the labour force in the modern sector some measure of rights and protection, it did not give labour any bargaining power. The 1936 Factory Act even explicitly excluded this right. Labour laws therefore were more of a cosmetic than a material nature. Although labour laws conveyed some idea of labour rights to the labour force, such rights were not yet to be exercised.

b) First legislative attempts (1900-1914)

Nevertheless, it was the field of occupational health and safety legislation that received much attention, relatively, from the Iranian Government. However, the first government measures concerning working conditions were associated with the Muslim character of the country. On 28 August, 1904, at the orders of Mozaffaroddin Shāh, the Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the foreign legations that, after an interim period of two weeks, no Muslim women were allowed to work in factories owned by foreigners (i.e. non-Muslims). This decree, so the legations were informed, had been issued to prevent unrest among the population. The factory owners were advised to employ boys of ten to twelve years instead.² From the situation later in the century, it is clear that this decree was completely ignored by both the authorities and the factory owners, a fate which befell most, if not all, social legislation in Iran.

Another instance of Government interference with working conditions occurred in 1913 in Kerman. The Deputy Governor of Kerman had laid down conditions to be maintained in carpet factories, which he made public in April 1913. This caused discontent among the employers who took sanctuary at the British consulate to protest against the 'social regulations'. According to the British Consul, the Regulations:

"for the most part were in themselves desirable, an opinion in which the Agents of the European Carpet Firms concurred. Some of them were however scarcely practicable, and to a large extent they could only be made effective after the lapse of a reasonable period of time, while in fact they were declared operative at once. On the other hand the conditions of the trade are notoriously scandalous and highly injurious to the health and well³ being of the workers who are largely small children".

The situation was complicated by the fact that the employers (owners of the carpet looms) worked on a contract basis for the European firms. If they had to work according to the new Regulations, they would be unable to fulfil their contracts, which would cause serious loss and inconvenience to the European firms. Moreover, the consul believed that the publication of the Regulations had not been occasioned by any humanitarian sentiments on the part of the Deputy Governor, but rather because of "a desire to turn a dishonest and oppressive penny". The employers, knowing this well, and being against any reform, made use of this knowledge to try to force the British consul and the European firms to support their case.

The consul (Lorimer) tried to outmanoeuvre them by stating that he would take no sides unless good arguments could be given to him to do so. He therefore invited both the strikers and the European firms to draw up a list of arguments against each single article of the Regulations. At first the employers did not comply with this suggestion, and the number of strikers (bastis) swelled to several hundred. After two days the strikers finally, on the evening of 11 April, 1913, presented Lorimer with their case, the Europeans having submitted a "more effective statement" earlier. To prevent the case being taken to the Russian consul as well, Lorimer discussed the matter with the Deputy Governor, and explained it "from the point of view of H.M. Consulate and the interests it represents, with appropriate remarks on the principle of 'festina lente'". He was able to persuade the Deputy Governor to issue an order stating that the enforcement of the Regulation was suspended pending deliberations

to be held in connection with the representatives of the foreign firms and of the weaving community.

The bastis at first did not want to accept this alternative, and demanded total abrogation of the Regulations. Lorimer made it clear to them that nobody could deny that there was a clear case for reforms and that he would support no action which was aimed at suppressing such measures. He had seen to it that the government did not act wantonly and irresponsibly; if they rejected the new order, he would cause it to be withdrawn. After some discussion, the strikers were finally satisfied and returned home. Lorimer did not expect the Deputy Governor to raise the issue again in a hurry, but he also was against bringing up the matter of reforms at once. He proposed to make an inventory of the working conditions prevailing in Kerman and, with collaboration of the European firms, gradually to have "improvements introduced where necessary⁴ in regard to overcrowding, ventilation, and cruelty to children".

c) Proposed reform by Ziyāoddīn's cabinet (1921)

The new government led by Ziyāoddīn had indeed prepared various measures which were to be executed by the Welfare Organization of the Municipality of Tehran (Edāreh-ye omūr-e khairiyeh-ye baladiyeh-ye Tehrān) which were made public in April 1921. Apart from measures in the fields of public health and consumer protection, action would be taken to combat unemployment. To that end a Labour Council (Shūreh-ye Mashāghel-e Kārgarān) was established, which was charged with finding jobs for unemployed workers, both skilled and unskilled. It had, moreover, to assist them when destitute, and to defend their rights, especially where their working hours and weekly rest period were concerned. For this purpose, the Council was also given powers to mediate between workers and employers, while it had to see to it that hygienic working conditions were adhered to. Finally, it was also responsible for the building of cheap housing, the provision of free schooling, (both general and professional) and, the establishment of creches for working mothers. To enable the Labour Council to carry out all these tasks in a satisfactory manner, it would be put in charge of an

'Assistance Fund' for the needy and a 'Loan Fund' for municipal functionaries. Another instrument to combat unemployment, municipal workshops (Kārkhāneh-hā-ye baladiyeh), would also be created, which would be open to both sexes.

Unfortunately these modern projects were not carried out. Not only was Ziyāoddīn dismissed, but the projects were neither economically feasible nor technically practical. Iran was too poor a country to be able to afford such trimmings of a welfare state. Moreover, it also lacked the technical capabilities, in terms of manpower, management and technical know-how to implement such a policy. Nevertheless, something of the spirit of these projects was retained by succeeding governments as shown by their efforts to improve working conditions in the carpet industry in Kerman, and, later in the decade, by the beginnings of an industrialization policy.⁵

d) The first debate in the Majles (1923)

Although the Government's activities in the field of legislation and regulation were almost exclusively concerned with the carpet industries during the period 1910-1939, there was a notable exception to this rule. For on November 29, 1922 the Majles discussed the welfare of the workers in connection with the Bill granting the Khoyī brothers concessionary rights for the manufacture of matches in Azarbaijan. Article 10 of the Bill obliged the employer to compensate workers for any damages suffered as a result of proven negligence or fault on the part of the employer. Several deputies opposed this provision on the grounds that the protection of the workers required a general law applicable to all factories and companies, for it would not be realistic to impose such rules on one company only. Modarris supported this view, saying that Iran had plenty of workers, but hardly any factories. Two deputies (Moḥammad Hāshem Mīrzā and Amīr Nāṣer) submitted that they had prepared such a general bill, but others argued that the Majles should not frighten off scarce entrepreneurs. Bahar, however, supported the adoption of such a general law but, in its absence, argued for this single case to serve as an example and a precedent. He also observed that the discussion was of historical importance, since it was the very

first time that the Majles had discussed employer-worker relations. On January 5, 1923 the Khoy'i bill was passed including Article 10 obliging the employer to compensate workers for damage suffered on the workfloor.

e) Regulations for the carpet industry

In the same year of 1923, the Government of Iran issued social regulations with regard to another branch of industry, the carpet industry in Kerman.

This Government interference did not have as much to do with a felt need on the part of the Iranian Government as the effect of the law shows. It was, rather, foreign influence which prompted the Iranian Government to take action. Iran was one of the first members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) created in 1914. The ILO, after having received reports on the miserable working conditions of female and child labourers in the Kerman carpet weaving workshops, discussed this problem in the Fifth Session of its Governing Body in 1920. It was decided that the Director of the ILO would "address a friendly representation to the Persian Government on the subject on the condition of the carpet weavers in Persia".⁷

The ILO, supported by the British Government, contacted the Iranian Government in early 1921. On May 16, 1921 the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mo'azzezoddouleh informed the British Legation that necessary instruction had been sent to "the local authorities in Kerman province and authorities in other places where there are carpet factories".⁸ These had reported that certain measures had been taken to improve the situation. The new Iranian government (for in February 1921 the coup d'etat led by Reza Khan had taken place), took this matter seriously and had appointed a commission in the Ministry of Public Works to study "the means by which the condition of child labour can be improved and drawing up regulations which will be put into operation when passed by the Government".⁹

On October 2, 1921 the Iranian Government informed the ILO that the improvement of labour conditions in general was a priority of the government programme and that it was likely that positive results might be realized shortly.¹⁰

On December 18, 1921 the Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the British Legation that, pending a final decision, the local authorities in Kerman had been instructed to implement the following measures:

- 1 Employment in the factories must be perfectly free;
- 2 The owners of the factories must undertake not to employ the labourers more than eight hours;
- 3 Children under ten years of age were not to be employed;
- 4 At midday the labourers must be allowed to go out of the factories and have a rest;
- 5 Factories must not be damp but properly ventilated and their sanitary condition must be perfect.
- 6 Proper seats must be provided for women and children so that they may be in comfort when working and no harm done to their nerves.

In addition the local authorities had to see to it that employers did not cheat the labourers with regard to their wages and other necessities. ¹¹ Meanwhile discussion had started in Kerman and other towns about labour conditions, for the British Legation had asked its various consuls to report on labour conditions in the carpet weaving industry. These enquiries precipitated an initiative by Bishop Linton, of the British Church Missionary Society in Kerman, who called together nine managers of carpet weaving factories in Kerman at his office to discuss the improvement of working conditions on December 5, 1921. He induced the managers to sign an undertaking which they would carry out in their own factories, viz.

- 1 That the factories themselves be properly ventilated and be kept clean and in good sanitary condition, and be well lighted;
- 2 That there be no overcrowding;
3. With regard to the sitting position of the workers:
 - (i) that the carpet beam be eleven inches from the ground i.e. that there be at least eleven inches between the bottom of the beam and the ground;
 - (ii) that the seat be a flat board, at least eleven inches

- broad;
- (iii) that, if children were employed, the seat must possess a back-rest;
- (iv) that the seat must not be raised to such an extent that the feet of the children cannot reach the floor;
- 4 That the minimum age of workers in the factory be eight years for boys and ten years for girls;
- 5 That no children under fourteen work more than eight hours a day.

Bishop Linton also tried to raise the question of wages for those who could not live on their present wages. The employers, however, were not prepared to raise them. For "if a child getting ten shahis a day is raised to fifteen shahis, the fifteen-shahi worker will want a Kran, and so on, and the cost of carpets will be raised by 50 per cent". Bishop Linton pointed out the fallacy of this argument, for a 50 per cent rise in wages does not mean a 50 per cent increase in the cost of the finished product. However, he was anxious to make a start and had already faced great difficulties over the question of the minimum age. Bishop Linton intended to have a meeting with the ustads (foremen) next to put this undertaking to them. Finally he wanted all employers to agree to these minimum conditions, for which he counted on British support.¹²

The Government meanwhile had also initiated negotiations with the employers, who made strong objections to the eight-hour working day, the sanitary measures, and Government interference in the fixing of wages. Finally the Governor-General (vali) of Kerman was ordered to issue the following decree on December 17, 1923:¹³

- 1 The working day shall not be more than eight hours;
- 2 On Fridays and public holidays work shall be suspended and workers will continue to receive their normal wages;
- 3 Boys under eight and girls under eighteen years of age shall not be employed;
- 4 Boys and girls shall work in separate workshops; Mixed workshops are absolutely forbidden;
- 5 Foremen (those who dictate the pattern to the workers) shall

- not enter the girls' workshop, where forewomen shall be employed
- 6 Employers shall not engage anyone with an infectious disease;
 - 7 Workshops should not be underground or damp, and must have windows on the south side;
 - 8 The weaving loom must be at one metre above the floor of the workshop and the seat high enough for children to be comfortable;
 - 9 The head of the Public Health Service of the municipal office shall inspect each factory each month. In case of non-compliance with the decree it will be reported and proper action will be taken;
 - 10 For every contravention, a fine of not less than 100 and not more than 500 krans, or imprisonment for not less than one day and not more than 20 days shall be imposed;
 - 11 The police shall be responsible for the supervision of the carrying out of these provisions.

According to Kechavarz, the Government also appears to have ordered a provisional pay rise of five per cent. The employers protested against this measure, for it did not take into account good and bad workers. However, this instruction was probably carried out.¹⁴

Although, as reports by British consuls show, working conditions in other parts of Iran needed improvement as well, the Government did not order implementation of the Kerman decree in other provinces. It nevertheless realized the need for wider application of the decree and appointed a commission to draw up new regulations of a more general nature, which could thus also be applied outside Kerman province.¹⁵

Meanwhile, both the ILO and the British Government were satisfied with the result of their activities. The British Minister responsible for ILO affairs declared in the House of Lords that the workers' situation had improved, though admitting that his remarks held only for Kerman.¹⁶

The British Government's assertion was based on reports from its consuls in Kerman, Hamadan and Tabriz written in August 1923. In Kerman, according to Dr. Schaffter, the physician of the

missionary hospital, the situation had much improved compared with that of 1913. Lighting and ventilation were satisfactory, hours of work had been shortened and wages increased, while very young children were no longer employed.¹⁷ The British Consul concluded that "the tendency is toward general improvement" as far as Kerman was concerned.¹⁸ The situation in Hamadan was also considered to be favourable where working conditions, wages, ages, and health were concerned. The manager of the two European factories boasted that many weavers had been with his company for twelve years already, and he invited the authorities to have the women examined medically to "dispose of any suggestion of prejudice to child-bearing."¹⁹ In the Soitanabad area there were no factories, only cottage industries, which made control and inspection an almost impossible proposition, for the Government the consul commented.²⁰ But he, like his colleague in Kerman, was of the opinion that in most cases the working conditions in the cottage industries were good. It was only in Tabriz that the British consul reported very bad working conditions in the Iranian factories. He had a favourable opinion of the conditions prevailing in the European factory where shorter working hours and better hygienic conditions obtained.²¹

The ILO had a similar impression and concluded that the matter had been dealt with in a satisfactory manner.²² Meanwhile when the Governor of Kerman tried, in early 1924, to enforce the regulations, he met with opposition from the employers. They protested to the British consul about "the injury to their interests which these rules seemed to threaten". After discussions between the Governor and the consul, some trifling modifications were agreed upon which were accepted by the employers. However, shortly thereafter the 1923 decree was cancelled by order from Tehran "on account of protests, it was said, from the master weavers, and nothing was heard anymore of the matter".²³

The ILO began having doubts about its earlier assessment of the working conditions in the carpet factories in Iran when in 1928 an article²⁴ appeared in the newspaper Shafaq-e Sorkh entitled: "The Kerman carpet or the extermination of the young generation of that province". The author of the article stated that wages were not enough to live on. The workers he described

as a collection of famished, pale, emaciated and deformed beings. In fact the article showed that not one single item of the 1923 act had been implemented. The journalist nevertheless had some hope for improvement in the situation, because a Government Commission was preparing a new set of regulations for the carpet factories. This commission was not apparently the same as that created in 1924, since it was specifically stated that it had been created at the initiative of Teimurtāsh, the powerful Minister of Court. In view of the good relationship between 'Alī Dashtī, the editor of Shafaq-e Sorkh,²⁵ and the government it seems quite likely that the article was a commissioned one. For, in that same year, a Government decree was issued entitled "Regulations for carpet manufactories and workshops", which contained instructions with regard to the layout of the buildings, hygienic conditions in the factories, working conditions, working hours and wages. From these regulations it is clear that it was based upon the 1923 Kerman decree, as we shall see.²⁶

According to the instructions on the layout of the buildings, the Regulations stipulated that weaving looms had to be at least one and a half metres above the ground; the building should not be humid, and should be constructed in such a way that the sun shone in. Ventilation should be provided, as well as a proper durable floor. Each worker should have a working space of at least three square metres. The height of the building should be at least four metres (art. 1 and 2).

The hygienic measures to be taken were the following: the building had to be in a good state and properly maintained. Workers were to have a seating arrangement that prevented physical deformation. In winter, space heating had to be provided by way of stoves and chimneys; open fires were not allowed. During working hours, adequate light had to be provided, while drinking water had to be clean and fresh. Each worker should have his own mug. Bugs and insects had to be dealt with properly, while care had to be taken that no flies, bugs, and dust could enter the working areas. The use of unprocessed and unwashed wool was forbidden in the manufactories. Clean and proper washrooms, which had to be maintained and disinfected regularly, had to be provided - one per 25 workers. After work

the working areas had to be cleaned and aired for at least one hour. Once a week the working areas had to be disinfected. Prior to engagement, and once a month during employment, workers should have a medical examination. If workers had a contagious disease or consumption, they could not be employed until they were declared ready for work by the medical authorities (art. 3-14).

Workers below the age of ten (boys) and twelve (girls) could not be employed, while male and female workers had to work in separate areas. Women who had to give birth were entitled to five weeks vacation on half pay (arts. 15-17).

The regulations on working hours and wages were as revolutionary as those on working conditions. In the carpet industry, henceforth a working day of eight hours and a week of 48 hours, rest periods excluded, were declared. Overtime was possible if both employers and employees agreed to it with a maximum of two hours per day and twelve hours per week, for which the workers were to receive a proportional increase (50 per cent) in pay. The rest period during midday was fixed at one and a half hours. Salaries were to be paid in cash, and payment in kind was forbidden unless the employee agreed to it. In case of an industrial accident or illness, the worker was entitled to shorter working hours, sick-leave, as well as to his full wages. The employer, moreover, had to pay the worker's medical bill. In the case of dismissal or death, all wages due to the worker had to be made over to him or his heirs (arts. 18-22).

These regulations held for all workshops with more than three workers, and were to be effective six months after the date of publication. The municipality was charged with supervising their implementation. Each contravention would be punished by one week's imprisonment or a fine from three to 50 krans (art. 23-28).

Unfortunately, information is lacking on the level of practicality which the Iranian government itself attached to these Regulations, which were quite revolutionary. For, even in Europe, the battle for the eight-hour working day and the 48-hour working week had yet to be won. It is therefore not surprising that these Regulations remained a dead letter. Working conditions continued to be bad, child labour was still the rule,

wages were pitiful, children and women suffered from their working conditions and nothing changed. The Government of Iran apparently had second thoughts about the whole scheme, for it did not even report the 'leap forward' to the ILO. In 1932 an Iranian economist noted that the wages of the workers, mostly children who looked emaciated and even sometimes crippled, were insufficient. The resulting indebtedness to the employer led to bonded labour, but no outcry was raised. Although an ILO mission visited Iran in 1934, no visits were paid to the traditional establishments, but only to the new, modern model factories.²⁷ In that same year the American Legation reported on the implementation of the 1923 decree and stated that "no such reforms have been made and probably were never a matter of serious consideration, except to the officials charged with the duty of drafting an appropriate memorandum on the subject".²⁸

f) The first social and labour laws (1931-1941)

On March 21, 1931 the first social security fund started to function in Iran when the cabinet approved the regulations for this fund for the benefit of road workers.²⁹ Those entitled to insurance were navvies, masons, carpenters, smiths, miners and other workers. The fund had to be financed from the contributions paid by the insured workers. The navvies, for example, paid 1 shahi per day. From those labourers who had a contract, a tariff of two per cent was deducted from their wages.

In exchange the fund provided the following services:

- a. Medical help to those fallen ill or wounded on the job. This included medicine, food, and medical services in the larger centres;
- b. In case of illness or accident as a result of employment the workers would be paid 50 per cent of their daily wage for a maximum of two years;
- c. Those permanently disabled would get a lump sum. In case of total disability, the sum would be equal to the contributions paid during the last two years with a maximum of 2,000 tomans. In case of partial disability, the indemnification would vary between 50 per cent and two and a half per cent of the contributions paid during the last two

- years depending on the kind of invalidity;
- d. Payment of a lump sum to the heirs, and to those of whom the deceased had the charge. The sum to be equal to the payments made during the last two years.

The management of the fund was in the hands of the Ministry of Communications in Tehran and its local branches.

It is not known how effectively this Fund operated, but some activities in this field were undertaken. Dispensaries, hospitals, and large accommodation barracks were built for the railway workers. In the north, where malaria was endemic, the Kamsax (the company in charge of constructing the railway) doctors practically eradicated malaria among the workers on the northern section of the line.³⁰

Following the establishment of this social security fund, there was no activity for some time on the social legislation front. However, in 1933, this period of inaction was followed by a burst of social legislation. It started with the Municipality of Tehran issuing a decree regulating labour conditions in the bakeries in Tehran.³¹ The decree also stipulated some hygienic and other public health measures. The impact of this set of regulations remained restricted, however, to the newly established modern bakery in Tehran. The traditional, private bakeries, where labour and hygienic conditions could certainly do with some regulation, were not included in the decree's sphere of reference.

This municipal decree was followed by a number of labour regulations issued by the central Government. On August 30, 1933 the cabinet approved the establishment of a social security fund for workers in state industries and mines. Its regulations³² were the same as those laid down for the fund for road workers. The creation of this fund was followed on December 25, 1933 by a set of regulations defining the labour conditions of all personnel involved in primary education.³³ A law, passed on March 10, 1934, regulated³⁴ the working conditions of teachers at teachers' colleges. A further law, regulating the position of state employees, was passed on May 2, 1936. Apart from giving them the right of a paid annual vacation, the law also regulated the conditions of leave of absence in case of illness.³⁵

The Factory Act

The bulk of social legislation during the 1930's had been almost exclusively concerned with state employees. Moreover, the regulations all had a sectoral objective, i.e. they were only applicable to certain groups of state employees or (sub) branches of industry. However, on August 10, 1936 the Majles adopted the Factory Act, which was general in nature and required factories with ten or more workers to install a wide range of health services, including washing facilities, lavatories, working clothes, creches and the like, as well as a comprehensive scheme of accident insurance. On paper the Act looked quite revolutionary, but in practice workers did not benefit from its results, since there were hardly any.³⁶

This was due to the fact that the Government did not create an inspection agency, while the penalties for employers were very light (fines ranging from 20 to 70 riyals; imprisonment of three to seven days), in fact it could be argued that the Factory Act actually made the position of workers worse, for their obligations were enforceable and, ironically, the employers themselves were charged with part of the implementation of the Act. The salaries of the workers could be diminished, they could be fined and imprisoned, and all this at the whim of the employer. These sanctions were considerable ones, for the fines for example (five to 50 riyals) constituted a one-day to two-weeks salary for a worker! Workers, moreover, could also be forced to compensate the employer for any loss due to their negligence. It is, however, difficult to assess the effect of this Act since data are lacking. From data from a later period it can be inferred that, as a result of this Act, some improvements were made in working conditions as far as hygiene was concerned. In general, however, it made the workers even more dependent and subservient to the employers than they were before.

The biggest employer in the country, the APOC, did not implement the Act either. According to Elwell-Sutton "an APOC circular criticized as impractical many of the provisions of this act; it indicated that the company would find it impossible to modify its practices in order to bring them into line with the new law. The Act no doubt became a dead letter in many parts of the country - but nowhere more than in the oil districts of

Khuzistan".³⁷

After passing the Factory Act, the government appeared to have spent most of its energy. After that date only a few social laws were passed dealing with marginal groups. In 1937, a law was passed regulating the employment of prisoners in industrial and agricultural establishments. They were to receive the same salary as non-prison inmates. However, political prisoners³⁸ and those sentenced to hard labour were excluded from this law. On September 4, 1937 a law was passed regulating labour condition of pearl-divers.³⁹ This was followed by a decree (dated January 14, 1939) regulating some aspects of employment of pilots in Iranian ports.⁴⁰ In that same year the working conditions of medical personnel in government services were regulated⁴¹, while the last act in the field of social legislation⁴² during the period under study was undertaken by the Municipality of Tehran. In February 1941 this body issued a decree fixing wages in the building industry.

Although it is difficult to evaluate the effect of these laws, it is reasonably certain that the state employees covered by the various laws benefited from them. As pointed out already above, this did not hold for the Factory Act, although here also some effect cannot be denied. However, in general working conditions continued to be as they were, bad. This was not only due to the fact that the few social laws that existed were not at all or only partially implemented, but also and more importantly, that a large part of the labour force was not covered by any social legislation at all. This held especially for the small-scale industry sector, the largest employer.

NOTES TO PART TWO

- 1 See Part One on the activities of the trade unions.
- 2 Algemeen Rijks Archief, the Hague, Legatie Perzie, bundel 22
- 3 PRO, FO 248/1072 folios 62 (April 7, 1913), 68-70 (April 14, 1913)
- 4 Ibid., Unfortunately the FO files do not contain a copy or description of the Regulations
- 5 Revue du Monde Musulman, 1921, 125-27 quoting from the newspaper 'Iran' of April 26, 27, 1921

- 6 Majles-e Shourā-ye Mellī, 1924, 1380-84
- 7 Chaqueri, 1978, 202 quoting FO 371/9030 f. 197
- 8 Ibid., 208 quoting FO 371/6450 f. 17
- 9 Ibid.,
- 10 Kechavarz, 1934, 51
- 11 FO 371/7829 f. 160 Assadollah, Moshar es Sultane to Norman, Tehran, December 18, 1921
- 12 FO 371/7829 f. 163-64; the undertaking was signed by representatives of nine companies who are mentioned on Ibid., f.163
- 13 Chaqueri, 1978, 206; for the official text see ILO, Serie Legislative 1923, Perse 1
- 14 Kechavarz, 1934, 60
- 15 idem
- 16 ILO, 1928b, 381-82
- 17 FO 371/9030 f.205 C.M. Schaffter's statement, Kerman, August 19th 1923. The report also notes that "Bishop Linton visited Kerman in May 1923 and expressed pleasure at the improvement already noted in the carpet industry"
- 18 FO 371/9030 f.204 Haworth, L. to Sir Percy Loraine, Kerman 21st August 1923. He considered Schaffter's report on the local looms somewhat cold. "All the workrooms I have seen are excellent." He also remarked "Indeed with the standard set by European firms I doubt if the work could be done in bad conditions and I consider that cause for complaint no longer exists"
- 19 FO 371/9030, f. 218-19 F. Hale to Loraine, Hamadan, 24th October 1923 "The bazaar factory contains 110 looms in one large hall. The office factory contains 64 looms in two large halls. Both factories are well lighted and ventilated, with waterproof roofs. In winter they are warmed with stoves. Each factory employs a special water carrier who brings in drinking water in a clean skin throughout the day. Water closets are of the usual type. The cesspools are emptied thrice annually. Each factory is swept daily"
- 20 FO 371/9030, f.220 F. Hutton to Loraine, Sultanabad, October 30th 1923; an obstacle here was "the established custom of the country by which no one, Government official or otherwise, may enter a carpet factory without previously

informing the agent of the owner of the carpets on the looms, who may accompany him. (This recognised custom is due to the fact that many carpet designs are private property and have to be kept secret). FO 248/1072, f.96 Kirman Diary (April 1913)

- 21 FO 371/9030 f. 215-17 consul to Loraine, October 25 1923
- 22 ILO, 1928a, 109
- 23 FO 416/112, f. 104
- 24 see note 22, 109-110 for the full text of the article
- 25 FO 416/112 f. 180 calls Dashtī a lackey of Teimurāsh
- 26 For the complete text of these Regulations see Kechavarz, 1934, 112-119
- 27 Weaver, 1933, 516-522
- 28 Ladjevardi, 1981, quoting Raymond Hare, 15 October 1934 (891.655/30) National Archives
- 29 ILO, 1932, 135; Majmū'eh-ye qavānīn-e moẓū'eh va moṣūbat-e doureh-ye panjom-e taqnīnīyeh, Majles Printing Office, n.d.,
- 30 Conolly, 1935, 45
- 31 ILO, 1933a, 335
- 32 ILO, 1933b, 11
- 33 ILO, 1934, 185-86
- 34 Ibid.,
- 35 ILO, 1936b, 222
- 36 An English translation has been published by Elwell-Sutton, 1941, 213-24
- 37 Ibid., 1955, 97
- 38 ILO, 1936a, 32; and ILO, 1937a, 342
- 39 ILO, 1937b, 204
- 40 ILO, 1939a, 441
- 41 ILO, 1939c, 719
- 42 US Government, 1946, 56

Part III. LABOUR CONDITIONS

a) Introduction

In the last section of this study, some information is offered on actual working conditions in Iran. The material presented is uneven in quality, both in time and location. Therefore, the picture of labour conditions is descriptive and impressionistic rather than analytical. Nevertheless, it is a bleak picture of the lot of the worker with regard to hours, health conditions, wages, and social conditions. It also shows how ineffective the labour unions had been in bringing about any change in these dismal working conditions. In fact, labour unions had hardly any, if at all, influence on changes in these conditions. This holds especially for the legislation that was passed, which was neither the result of, nor in reaction to, demands from labour unions, nor did it address the labour force's problems in practice. Where a beneficial development took place it was rather a by-product of other developments, such as the construction of modern factories. Labour had no say in or control over its own destiny, neither about the direction of the course it was on, nor about the pace at which it was to proceed.

b) Working hours

Though there is much variety in the information on the working hours of the industrial labour force in Iran in general, it can be said that ten to twelve hours per day was normal. Longer working days, of up to sixteen hours, also appear to have existed.¹ There are several difficulties with these estimates. First, there were no fixed rules where working hours were concerned, for there was no labour law fixing them. An exception to this rule was the situation of the printers who had obtained an eight-hour working day in 1918,² while the workers of the APOC also worked only eight hours.³

Second, in case of payment per unit of production an able worker could work more than a less fortunate colleague. Or a better fed and healthy worker was able to produce more in the same time than a hungry and sick worker. These therefore could afford to work less time, if they wanted, which more often than

not did not happen.⁴

Third, the length of the working day fluctuated with the seasons. In winter time the working day (from sunrise to sunset) would be shorter than in summer time.⁵ Or, in case of agro-industries when it was harvest time the working day was longer than usual. In those cases extra time was worked, of course, which brings us to the last variable : overtime. Many of the modern factories, for example, had an official working day of eight hours only. But the workers often preferred to do two hours overtime in view of their low salaries. So it would seem that their working day was ten hours,⁶ while in reality they only were obliged to work for eight hours.

The average annual working week could in many cases be as short as 40 hours due to the official religious festivals. In the modern factories, however, many of these festivals were not recognized as holidays. This also held for the month of fasting, Ramazan, when fewer hours per day were worked, but people continued to work nevertheless. Since workers received no wages for such holidays they did not mind continuing to work on those days. If workers wanted to celebrate a festival like id-e ghadir they had to compensate the employer for their absence by working on other free days.⁸ In all branches of industry Friday was not a working day.

c) Occupational safety and health

Normal working conditions in Iranian industry were very bad. This was true for children as well as adults. The workers were often already in poor health before they were engaged for employment, for, even if they had not contracted one of the many endemic or contagious diseases, they were more often than not undernourished. Their working conditions⁹ contributed much to sustain this condition if to not worsen it.

The buildings in which many of the industrial labour workers spent the largest part of the day had not been built with a view to providing optimal working conditions. Maintenance was badly lacking, as were the necessary repairs to walls, leaking roofs, and floors. Workers moreover were exposed to dust, steam, down and dirt, which led to all kinds of respiratory troubles. The

working areas often were badly heated and very humid, and it was not exceptional to see little children at work in dark, humid holes, half-naked, with their feet in water under the constant supervision of the foreman or employer.¹⁰

Lunch, half an hour to an hour, was taken on the premises, often in the very room or hall where the workers did their normal job. There was no washing room where workers could clean themselves, except in very few establishments. Toilets were not normally provided either, and those facilities which were used for that purpose did not deserve the name of toilets. These places were not regularly cleaned, let alone disinfected. Since, more often than not, no proper ventilation existed, the air in the workshops was very insalubrious and unhealthy.¹¹

Apart from washing and eating facilities, often even the provision of drinking water was lacking. If it existed, the water was often stinking and stagnant.¹² The Vatan textile mill (built in 1925) was reported to have only one drinking vessel for 400 persons, which was not provided by the employer, but was the private possession of the smith. Each of the 400 workers drank out of this cup - hardly a situation furthering hygienic conditions. During the summer the workers used a water melon as a drinking vessel.¹³

The working conditions in the carpet factories in Kerman have received special attention, from both native and foreign observers. This was caused by the fact that working conditions were abominable, for it was mainly child and female labour working in that branch of industry. Conditions were such that many children and women (girls rather) often became crippled for life. Apart from having to work in subterranean, often cave-like, badly-lit, cold, humid, unventilated areas, the workers were seated in such a way that they always were sitting stooped. This position was often conducive to "permanent deformities of the arms and legs, and irreparable damage to general health".¹⁴ In Kerman the girl workers were often afflicted by ankylosis of the lower abdomen. When these girls became pregnant they often died in childbirth. When a hospital was available, a craniotomy operation could be done, in up to 50 per cent of births. In the streets of Kerman the Reverend Boyland observed "one is constantly reminded of the iniquity of this child-labour by

seeing deformed and stunted women, and occasionally men who are no longer able to work, as their hands are often deformed as well, and are reduced to beggary"¹⁵.

With the establishment of the new factories, the working conditions improved. The factories were well-lit and ventilated, the buildings airy and well-constructed. Toilets and water were often available, while the surroundings of the factory were often attractive gardens¹⁶.

When working with machines or dangerous materials, no special protective measures were taken. This was also true of the new state and private factories established in the 1930's, which provided good working conditions in general, from the hygienic point of view. At the cement factory in Tehran, for example, the workers who filled the sacks did not have masks, so that they had nothing to keep the cement out of their lungs¹⁷.

In private industries the situation, of course, was no different. In the fish-canning plant in Bander 'Abbas there was no protection against danger from the sharp spears. Since no accidents were reported the workers must have been very lucky¹⁸.

In case of an industrial accident, however, the employers did not bear the cost of medical care. The same was true when a worker was ill, in that case he received no wages either. In case of death as a result of an industrial accident compensation was only rarely paid to the relatives of the deceased¹⁹. The adoption of the Factory Act in 1936 did not really change this situation.

d) Wages and purchasing power

Payment of wages was mostly by the day. The level of wages varied according to location, season, factory, sex, age, and ability, of course. Payment, moreover, was not so much a right as an entitlement which had to be continually enforced. When economic conditions were bad, the employer could, and in fact did, lower the wages unilaterally. It would appear that this situation improved for factory workers during the 1930's.

Most of our data on wages refer to the 1930's and more often than not are of an impressionistic nature, or are spot wages. Only in a few cases do we have disaggregated data. Because the

rate of wages was also dependent on all sorts of variable conditions it is impossible, as yet, to make definitive statements on this subject, which could go beyond the level of a general observation.

In 1925 the British commercial attaché reported that minor government officials, representing 70 per cent of all those employed as clerical labour in Tehran, received a minimum wage of 32 tomans per month. Those doing menial work received as little as five tomans in the provinces. The payment of wages was usually in arrears and the commercial attaché considered these wages "at all times inadequate"²⁰. In 1928 another British commercial attaché remarked that a labourer's wage amounted to three to four qrans per day. For these wages he could only buy "bread and cheese and an occasional piece of cotton cloth for his women-folk". Artisans received more, viz. five to ten qrans per day²¹.

Printers were better paid than most other workers. An adult printer, around 1930, received between twelve and twenty tomans per month. An apprentice was paid three to six tomans, whilst a type-setter even received as much as 35 to 40 tomans per month. Printers, apart from government officials, were clearly among the best paid category of the labour force. Workers in the fisheries industry, for example, received fifteen to 20 tomans per month. The fact that many Russians also worked in this industry no doubt had an upward effect on the level of wages²².

In other industrial sectors wages were much lower. Unskilled casual labour rarely received more than two qrans per day. Construction workers (housing) would get two to three qrans per day for twelve hours of work. The railway workers received three qrans per day or nine tomans per month for a 10 to 12 hour working day²³.

In the carpet industry wages were likewise very low. For very long working days - up to sixteen hours it is reported - under very bad working conditions wages of one to three qrans were usual. Even in the case of an able worker not more than 3.5 qrans per day could be earned²⁴. In 1932 an ILO mission observed that in a 'modern' factory wages for men were five riyals, for women, two riyals, and for children 0.25 to two riyals. In another factory where wages were paid on the basis of piece-work

the women and girls rarely received more than two riyals per day²⁵.

In Tabriz the lowest rate was paid in the leather factories; in 1929 it amounted to two riyals per day, while in 1937 the rate was four riyals²⁶.

In the Vatan factory the workers went on strike in 1931 because of their low wages, largely. Two different rates were in use; one for the weaving and one for the spinning section. In the weaving section wages were calculated by output, and a worker received five to seven shahis per metre. Even a very able weaver could not produce more than fifteen to seventeen metres so the maximum wages to be made amounted to four to 4.5 qrans per day. The average worker however, was only able to earn ten to fifteen qrans per week. In the spinning section wages were by the day. The minimum rate was 25 to 45 shahis for unskilled labour, and semi-skilled workers received 55 shahis. Women and children were paid less by fifteen shahis to one qran²⁷.

In the APOC, unskilled labourers earned between ten to fifteen tomans per month in 1929, although a great many did not get more than nine tomans. This wage rate was much lower than that paid in 1924, viz. fifteen to 20 tomans per month. Skilled Iranian labour received between fourteen and 20 tomans in 1929, but 25 to 50 tomans in 1925. Wages for non-Iranian (mainly Indian) labour were much higher. The English management and skilled staff received between 500 and 1500 tomans per month in 1929. According to another source, the wages for unskilled labour in 1925 were only two to three qrans per day or six to nine tomans per month. The same wage also obtained in 1931 according to a letter published in Peikār in 1931. According to a labourer from the south, the wages in 1929 amounted to a monthly average of eight to fourteen tomans. Whereas in 1924 they earned fifteen to 20 tomans²⁸.

In 1937 an enquiry was organized in 12 cotton spinning mills which yielded the following results: that the average wages per ten hour day rose from 1.53 riyals in 1934-35 to 2.07 riyals in 1936-37²⁹. It is moreover striking to observe that in one year (1936-37) there could be a difference in wages between the highest and lowest paid day-labourer in different factories of nearly 300 per cent. This probably is the result of the level of

productivity, unfortunately the data did not allow the researchers to draw conclusions on that issue. Skilled wool carders and spinners however received higher wages, respectively 4, 5 to 6 riyals and 5 to 8 riyals per day³⁰.

A royal misstep

On April 18, 1938 Foruhar, the Minister of Mines and Industries, addressed a circular to all spinning and weaving mills instructing their owners that the daily wages to be paid to ordinary workers and weavers should not exceed four riyals per day for a working day which should not be less than ten hours.

TABLE 6: Wages for Day-labourers for 10 hour Working-day

Factory	1934-35	1935-36	1936-37
1	-	-	0.83
2	-	-	-
3	3.08	1.23	1.57
4	1.79	1.70	2.61
5	-	-	3.52
6	1.99	2.27	1.76
7	-	-	2.33
8	-	-	1.23
9	-	2.03	1.88
10	-	3.13	2.68
11	1.25	1.26	1.20
12	1.44	1.88	2.17
averages	1.53	1.63	2.07

The employers were taken completely unawares by this sudden decision, for which no explanation was given, nor had any previous discussion taken place between the Government and the employers. The British Ambassador reported that "it was generally believed that the circular was drafted at the request of His Imperial Majesty, when the latter discovered that a large number of spinners and weavers from his own factory, who were receiving only four rials per diem, were deserting and leaving for Isfahan and Shiraz where more lucrative wages could be obtained".

Since the circular stated that the decision was final, the employers and workers were dismayed. The mill owners of Isfahan, in spite of the finality of the circular, lodged protests with the Governor of Isfahan and the Minister of Industry. These expressed their regrets and told the factory owners that nothing could be done in this matter. It was, however, intimated that the Ministry would not carry out the announced regular inspections on the implementation of the decree.

The situation was finally solved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The factory owners introduced, by common consent, various means to circumvent the circular, and avoided discussion or even reference to the document. The means employed were the promotion of a large number of workers "to be éostadsé, headmen or foremen in charge of one or two machines, labourers have been appointed to hold two jobs and get paid for each. It is reported that most of the spinners and weavers in the various mills are now 'ostads' and that approximately 25 per cent of the unskilled labour receives 4 rials per diem". The Ministry considered the matter had settled itself in accordance with the circular and made no further investigations³¹.

Wages had increased greatly in 1941 as compared with 1937 if we take the Isfahan textile mills as an example (Table 7). It is difficult to compare the 1941 average in Isfahan with the 1937 data, since it is not clear whether the latter were based on the minimum or maximum wage rates. Assuming that a total average was calculated, we observe an increase of 200 per cent in average wages.

What did these wages mean in terms of the cost of living? Unfortunately data are lacking. Household Food Consumption surveys were made in 1937, but these were restricted to middle-income families.³² The majority of the labour force did not fall within this range, so the results of that survey cannot help. A contemporary impressionistic report reveals the data in Table 8. According to the same source these were the the minimum requirements of a family of four, viz. two qrans and eleven shahis (51 shahis). A normal wage wate for an unskilled labourer would be three qrans per day, so that the family could save nine shahis. However, most workers could not even afford these expenditures. They hardly ever had meat, their daily diet

TABLE 7: Average Wages in Riyals in the Isfahan Textile Mills,
September 1941.(33)

Factories	Boys		Girls	
	min.	max.	min.	max.
Nakhtab	2.00	4.00	2.00	3.70
Pashmbaf	1.50	5.00	1.50	3.00
Risbaf	2.00	4.50	1.50	2.50
Sena'eh-ye pashm	3.50	4.50	2.00	3.00
Zayanedebrud	3.20	4.70	2.00	3.20
Vatan	4.50	7.00	3.50	4.50
Shahreza	2.50	5.00	2.50	3.00
Rahimzadeh	3.00	4.50	3.00	4.50
Risandegi barq	2.20	4.00	2.50	5.00

Factories	Women		Men	
	min.	max.	min.	max.
Nakhtab	2.50	4.00	3.00	9.50
Pashmbaf	2.50	4.00	3.00	10.00
Risbaf	2.50	4.50	4.50	10.00
Sena'eh-ye pashm	2.50	4.00	6.00	10.00
Zayanedebrud	2.80	4.30	3.90	8.90
Vatan	2.80	3.50	5.00	10.00
Shahreza	3.20	6.50	4.20	9.20
Rahimzadeh	3.00	4.50	5.00	8.00
Risandegi barq	2.50	4.00	3.25	7.50

TABLE 8: Daily Expenditure of a Family of Four in Khuzestan
1931.(34)

sugar	5 shahis
bread	12
meat	10
tobacco	4
kerosene	3
rent	3
washing, soap	
clothes etc.	14
	51 shahis

consisted mainly of bread and dates. Cheese was a luxury. So it would look as if the minimum requirements were a wish rather than a reality.

Using the Isfahan data for 1941 (Table 9) as a yard-stick, together with a list of prices referring to the situation in October 1941 we may calculate the level of purchasing power. Since we have no idea what the dietary pattern was in Isfahan at that time, I have used the data of a typically dietary pattern in

TABLE 9: Prices of Necessities of Life Consumed by the Lower Classes in Isfahan(35)

Wheat	2 riyals per kg.	Tea per packet	45.00 per kg
Bread	2	Barley	1.15
Rice	4.15	Straw	0.35
Sugar,moist	26.70	Kerosene	1.50
Sugar,loaf	26.70	Firewood	0.35
Mutton	4.30	Charcoal	1.00
Ghee	21.65	Milk	1.70
Fowls each	10.00	Eggs each	0.25

urban south Iran (Fars province) for the years 1962-68 which was the closest reliable data available on this subject³⁶. From Table 10 we see that a few necessities such as fuel, and tea are not included. We furthermore notice that, among the list of goods of 1941, pulses, fruits, and vegetables are missing. We may safely assume that all these omitted goods, from one or another Table, were used by the working class in Isfahan at that time. The five goods items for which we have been able to calculate the expenditure per person per day result in a minimum requirement per family of four persons of 5.68 riyals per day excluding fuel, tea, fruit, vegetables and pulses, goods which it is impossible they could have done without. In only three out of nine textile mills did the men earn a minimum wage sufficient to afford this expenditure. Unless they earned more, they had to starve. A similar situation existed in Azarbaijan in 1936 using the relevant data for Azarbaijan for 1962-68.

TABLE 10: Typical Dietary Pattern in Urban Iran/Fars Province 1962-68.

Food group	Price 1941 per kg.	*Possible diets in grams per caput per diem			Expenditure
		I	II	III	
Bread	2 riyals	400	462	391	0.782 riyals
Sugar	26.70	57	84	37	0.320
Mutton	4.30	40	48	32	0.137
Ghee	21.65	11	17	4	0.086
Milk	1.70	34	154	55	0.093
Potatoes		46	34	12	
Pulses		27	25	6	
Vegetables		66	103	39	
Fruits		115	17	90	
Total calories		2 210	2 200	1 796	1.4201 riyals
% of requirement		96	96	78	

*Possible diets made up of different amounts (grams, per caput, per diem) of comestibles listed in the table are represented by columns I, II & III.

TABLE 11: Prices of Articles of Prime Necessity in Tabriz(37)

Group	Unit	Prices in riyals	
		Dec. 1935	Dec. 1936
Charcoal	Batman	2.40	2.40
Wood	Kharvar	70.00	95.00
Rice(Resht)	Batman	9.00	12.00
Rice(local)	do.	4.00	5.60
Bread	do.	2.00	2.40
Ghee	do.	32.00	44.00
Split peas	do.	7.00	4.60
Cheese(local)	do.	11.00	14.00
Beans	do.	3.40	4.00
Yarma	do.	3.00	3.00

Cotton cloth	metre	2.40	4.00
Woollen cloth	do.	30.00	42.00
Shoes	pair	40.00	50.00
Soap	batman	16.00	22.00
Sugar	do.	15.00	12.20
Tea	girvanka	10.00	22.00
Eggs	each	0.15	00.125
Chickens	do.	3.00	4.00
Meat	batman	10.40	13.00

Another alternative was not to marry, or if married, to leave one's family in the village, or if in town, to have wife and children work as well.³⁸

The bleak picture offered by these data tallies with a report by the American legation on living conditions of workers in August 1941.

"Wages are certainly insufficient for more than bare existence, amounting for the common labourer to four to ten rials a day. It may be said that it will purchase a loaf of white bread or that a worker must pay from three to seven rials a day for his food. Thus it will be seen that the wage is insufficient even for food for a family and most workers have a starvation diet consisting of tea, (not white) bread, cheese and onions, with occasional greens and grapes and infrequent rice and cheap meat. It is not possible to buy adequate clothing or even to dream of luxuries such as education of the children. Sometimes the workers' one or more wives and the children work to bring in additional income to make possible a slightly higher standard of living"³⁹.

This low level of wages also explains why workers were so eager to do overtime. All British observers note that "for the great bulk of the population the standard of living remains very low"⁴⁰ and that, as in the case of Isfahan, the workers were exploited. In Azarbaijan the British Consul in 1936 was more optimistic, for "the new industries paid better wages than are paid at present...and shortage, rather than excess, of labour is

likely to be the embarrassment of the future"⁴¹. However, it is quite unlikely that he would have made the same remark by 1941 when the rise in industrialisation was a thing of the past, and taxes, inflation, and unemployment were the bane of the working class.

Although data are lacking, it is unlikely that the standard of living of the working class improved much, for Iran had a serious bout of inflation over the period of 1933-1943. Nominal wages increased, as we have seen in the case of Isfahan, but the cost of living index rose as well. For example, from 1937, when the index was 8.0 to 16.0 in 1941. In this way the 200 per cent rise in wages in Isfahan in that same period was completely annulled by inflation⁴². According to the American legation:

"the cost of living in Iran had increased...to the point where the toman (10 rials) has about the same purchasing power as the rial had twenty years ago. Wages have increased during the last twenty years about five to seven fold, so that there has been indeed a severe decline in real income"⁴³.

e) Social Conditions

Working conditions resembled slavery according to a British observer⁴⁴, while an American report states that "forced labour amounting to almost slavery, exists on some properties"⁴⁵. That this was not exaggerated is borne out by actual practice. The recruitment of labour for the state silk factory in Chalus in 1933 shows this clearly. Since in Mazandaran itself insufficient skilled labour was available locally, the government wanted Yazdi workers, who were very skilled in silk weaving, to migrate to Chalus. When these proved to be unwilling to do so, the police were ordered to take care of the recruitment.

"All persons known to be silk workers have been arrested; and as soon as a truck load had been assembled in the police station, they were shipped off to Mazandaran to tend the Shah's looms...

Much of the silk weaving in Yazd is home industry, and the

police have made house to house searches to locate looms and ferret out the weavers. Persons who were taken into police custody and who denied that they could operate a loom were beaten unmercifully by the police until either they confessed or the police were convinced that they were not weavers. No less than 350 men have been deported, and the search merrily continues".⁴⁶

Although normal recruitment did not take place in this manner, it nevertheless is an indication of the Government's attitude towards workers, an attitude which of course was reflected by that of the other employers as shown by their treatment of their own labour force.

The labourers were under constant supervision by their foremen, who vilified them and even went so far as to beat them, the bastinado not excluded. In one case a young worker was even killed by his employers, who only had to pay blood money in accordance with the precepts of Islam.⁴⁷

If late on the job, workers were fined. The fact in itself is acceptable, but if we may believe the available data, the fines were anything but just. A worker five to fifteen minutes late had to pay a fine which was twice his daily wage.⁴⁸ Workers of the APOC could be suspended, i.e. kept officially on the workforce but without pay until work was found within the Company. "This method was also used for purposes of discipline, a common penalty for misconduct being a few days' suspension".⁴⁹

Another abuse which appears to have existed during the pre-1925 years in the APOC area was the fact that Iranian workers were forced to buy their necessities of life in shops owned by Sheikh Khaz'al. Farmers bringing foodstuffs into Abadan either had to sell these to his shops or pay extra taxes on them.⁵⁰

Payment of wages was not regular. The workers had to ask for their money and were often paid a few days or a week later. Workers could not protest, for there was no one to turn to. They could, when in need of money, borrow from their employer and thus never get their total wages and become indebted to their employer. In the Vatan factory in Isfahan every Thursday night workers had to beg the pay-master to give them their wages. Even then he did not pay them immediately, but made them wait hours

for it, while he showered them with a hail of vilifications. His fund of bad language was proverbial and only after the proper submissive attitude had been shown would the workers finally get their due. In practice, wages seemed not to be the workers' right, but rather the employer's liberal gesture after he deigned to notice the workers⁵¹.

Although in this respect the situation in the APOC was much better, here (Iranian) workers were exposed to another abuse. The discrimination between APOC workers was considerable; for there was a difference between European, Indian and Iranian employees. Further cutting across this horizontal layer was the fact that there was a further division among the Iranians between those who were salaried staff, wage earners, and contract labour⁵².

The social amenities provided by the APOC were not available to all these groups, however, or to the same extent. Housing, for example, was granted on the basis of the length of service and the rate of pay. This meant that contract labour did not even qualify for housing. In Abadan the percentage of contract labour was between fifteen and 20 per cent, whilst in the fields it was over 50 per cent⁵³. In the latter case, a considerable proportion of the contract labour were local villagers, for whom the problem of housing did not arise. In Abadan, however, it was a serious problem.

TABLE 12: Houses Built by the APOC at Abadan(54)

	Houses for married salaried staff	Rooms for bachelor salaried staff	Houses for married wage earners	Rooms for bachelor wage earners
before 1934	476	774	28	33
1936-40	875	54	1 995	709
	1 351	828	2 023	742

From the data available on the APOC labour force it is clear that the supply of housing just did not suffice for effective demand.

It would appear that housing for salaried employees was more or less taken care of by 1941, at least the number of employees and the number of houses roughly tally. From the available data it is impossible to see whether married and bachelor workers were employed in the same composition as their corresponding houses, but it seem unlikely. Nevertheless, their situation looks much better than that of the wage earners who numbered 7,641 with only 2,023 houses available for married workers and 742 spaces for bachelors. Since the level of wages was more important than length of service this situation was especially resented by badly

TABLE 13: Iranian and Foreign Workers Employed by the APOC at Abadan(55)

	salaried employees		artisans		skilled labour	
	Ir.	Fo.	Ir.	Fo.	Ir.	Fo.
1935	495	919	2 175	405	2 838	42
1936	505	948	2 435	510	3 017	19
1937	632	869	2 386	460	3 034	2
1938	791	928	3 055	442	3 380	-
1939	1 007	1 260	4 924	839	4 452	-
1940	1 008	1 103	3 356	701	4 318	-
1941	908	1 010	2 757	804	4 189	-

paid wage earners⁵⁶. The privilege of housing was lost on termination of employment. The housing situation was worse in the fields which was partly caused by the uncertainty as to whether a certain area would be taken into production and for how long. Although construction materials were very difficult to obtain locally - a special cement factory had to be built - the APOC clearly intended to spend as little money as possible⁵⁷. For, even in 1935, the available housing was quite inadequate as compared with the number of people employed. In view of the complaints voiced by Indian workers in 1920, 1924, 1926 and the 1929 scuffle, one would have expected the APOC to deal with these problems properly. The more so, since according to Iranian data the APOC "did not build as single house, shack or shelter for the Iranian worker from 1920 to 1933"⁵⁸. By 1941 the Company had improved its performance by having built 1,552 houses for a

labour force of more than 15,000.

Similar remarks can be made about the difference in treatment of Iranian and foreign labour in the field of such amenities as water, electricity, food supply, recreation and medical services⁵⁹. One can of course maintain that one cannot blame the APOC for not doing what the Iranian Government should have done. The only hospital in Abadan was that of the APOC; the Company in 1936 also undertook to supply Abadan with adequate amounts of water and electricity; all these activities should have been the Government of Iran's business. However, the Company had taken a few of these tasks upon itself and it should have executed them properly, but did not. One can also make the excuse that the APOC's record compared favourably with the record of the Iranian government, and that, compared with Iranian employers, the APOC was a much better employer, but at best, the APOC was the best of a bad lot. What was worse, however, was its policy of discrimination on racial grounds and the tendency prevalent among the British staff to treat the Iranians as an inferior race.⁶⁰

NOTES TO PART THREE

- 1 Chaqueri, 1978, 29, 36, 44, 66, 71, 82, 88; Olmer, 1908, 11; FO 371/9030, f.215, 218, 220
- 2 see above
- 3 FO 416/112, f.114 "eight hour working day, six days per week was the rule"
- 4 In some professions, skilled workers had shorter working days. For example, Olmer, 1908, 11, mentions that workers in the faience industry tending the oven could only work two hours per day, while in the potteries the workers only worked four to five hours per day, *ibid.*, 59
- 5 Hours of work in the Hamadan carpet factories in 1923 for example were "in Summer 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. with two hours off in the middle of the day i.e. eleven hours. Winter 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. with one hour off at midday, i.e. nine hours, FO 371/9030, f.218
- 6 FO 371/40222, f. 70-81; the same attitude prevailed among traditional crafts such as carpet weaving "as the head

- weavers are paid by piece work some of the looms may be working during part of the off hours, as the weavers do not go home at midday" FO 371/9030, f.218
- 7 Chaqueri, 1978, 88; FO 416/112, f.104
- 8 ILO, 1939, 491
- 9 On health conditions in Iran see Neligan, 1926, 635-39; Lingeman, 1930, 37 "the endemicity of such diseases as typhoid and small-pox and the abnormally high death rate is not unnatural. Malaria, tuberculosis and affections of the eye are among the diseases commonly encountered"; In 1935 Simmonds, 1935, 37 stated "disease is naturally widespread and until better sanitary conditions are provided no real improvement can be expected"
- 10 Chaqueri, 1978, 36; Olmer, 1908, 11; Kechavarz, 1934, 33, 53
- 11 Ibid., 33; FO 371/9030, f.215 (Tabriz 1923), "Sanitary arrangements" unknown. "Insanitary conditions abound as the work is often carried on in dark damp cellars"; Chaqueri, 1978, 61
- 12 Ibid., 46; Kechavarz, 1934, 53
- 13 Chaqueri, 1978, 46
- 14 Ibid., 210-12 quoting British missionaries such as Reverend Boyland (FO 248/1343) Kirman 1921; Bishop Linton (1924). It is noteworthy that similar problems were not reported from other areas in Iran, see for example Chaqueri, 1978, 205 reproducing a letter from the British consul at Soltanabad (FO 371/10131, f.140, f.14) and also the British consul at Tabriz, FO 371/9030, f.215 "At the commencement of the weaving of a carpet the operatives squat on the floor; as the work gradually rises from the ground they rise with it and sit crosslegged on planks. This is not considered a hardship for Persians as it is the posture they usually adopt when resting in their own homes. If they had chairs provided (or any other sort of comfortable seat) I doubt whether they would appreciate the innovation"
- 15 Chaqueri, 1978, 210
- 16 Conolly, 1935, 460; Weaver, 1933, 520. However, not all observers had a favourable opinion of the new factories. The American Legation reported that "the silk factory at Chalus is doubtless a source of Imperial satisfaction, but the

- European foremen describe the conditions under which the women and children work as appalling, and the pay they receive as totally inadequate", Ladjevardi, 1981, quoting James S. Moose Jr. 20 July 1940, (891.00/1758) National Archives p.101
- 17 FO 371/40222, f.5
- 18 Ibid.,
- 19 Ibid.,
- 20 Hadow, 1925, 41
- 21 Lingeman, 1928, 30
- 22 Chaqueri, 1978, 75, 88
- 23 Ibid., 89
- 24 Ibid., "In Tabriz in 1923 wages in the carpet factories averaged one kran 35 cents per day, but piece workers make up to 3 krans" FO 371/9030, f.216; In Hamadan in 1923 "a ten year old learner receives a minimum of ten shahis per diem. A number of head weavers receive a daily average of six krans", Ibid., f.218
- 25 Weaver, 1933, 520
- 26 FO 371/20830, f.185 (Memorandum on Economic Affairs in Azarbaijan 1936)
- 27 Chaqueri, 1978, 43-45
- 28 Ibid., 14, 29, 74, 82 (reproducing Peikār, Setāreh-ye Sorkh and Profintern material)
- 29 ILO, 1938, 88
- 30 Ibid.,
- 31 FO 371/18231
- 32 ILO, 1937, 881-84
- 33 FO 371/40222, f.33
- 34 Chaqueri, 1978, 71-72
- 35 FO 371/40222, f. 37
- 36 Based on Sen Gupta, 1968. Column I refers to the data of Azarbaijan, II to that of Isfahan, and III of Fars
- 37 FO 371/20830, f.205
- 38 Chaqueri, 1978, 36
- 39 Ladjevardi, 1981, 103 quoting Harold B. Minor, 12 August 1941 (891.00/1816) National Archives
- 40 Simmonds, 1935, 36

- 41 FO 371/200830, f. 179; his colleague in Kermanshah stated for example that "the same poverty and misery is to be found both in the country and in the town now, just as it existed fifteen years ago" and he only noted a slight improvement for government officials, FO 371/21900, f. 112
- 42 Bharier, 1971, 49
- 43 See note 39
- 44 FO371/18995, Annual report for 1934
- 45 Ladjevardi, 1981, 103 quoting Harold B. Minor 12 August 1941 (891.00/1816) National Archives. In the carpet industry for example, "where the boys have neither parents nor guardians they are frequently given advances until, like the pearl divers in the Persian Gulf, they find themselves hopelessly in debt, completely in the hands of their employers and are practically 'slaves'", FO 371/9030, f.216 (Tabriz, 1923); see also Kechavarz, 1934, 30, 49-52
- 46 Ladjevardi, 1981, 102 quoting James S. Moose Jr. 6 April 1939 (891.6552/4) National Archives
- 47 Chaqueri, 1978, 15
- 48 Ibid., 42, 44
- 49 Ellwell-Sutton, 1955, 90
- 50 Chaqueri, 1978, 41
- 51 Ibid., 45; Kechavarz, 1934, 32-33
- 52 Chaqueri, 1978, 14
- 53 ILO, 1950, 29
- 54 Ibid., 33, Table IX
- 55 Ibid., 155, Table IX
- 56 Ibid., 33-34; what made it worse was the fact that "a wife cannot join her husband in a permanent home until he has served seven years which had bad results" PRO, LAB 13/39
- 57 On housing problems and the attitude of the APOC see also Ellwell-Sutton, 1955, 94-95
- 58 Government of Iran, 1952, 14
- 59 Ibid., 15 ff; ILO, 1950, 32 ff; Ellwell-Sutton, 88 ff.
- 60 Ibid.,

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Kohfiankii



وزارت امور خارجه
الار. پرورد قار.
مورده ۳۲۱۳
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Cher Monsieur
Le 29 Djumadi el Tan 1322
(10 septembre 1904.)

Monsieur le Ministre
Des rapports reçus par
le Gouvernement mentionnant
qu'il y a des sujets étrangers
ont l'intention d'établir des
fabriques pour manipuler
le coton et les versons de
soie etc. Ces sujets étrangers
n'ont pas demandé jusqu'à
présent l'autorisation
nécessaire au Gouvernement
Ottoman.

J'ai l'honneur de Vous
prier de bien vouloir faire
savoir aux sujets de Votre
Gouvernement que sans
l'autorisation du Gouvernement
Ottoman aucun sujet étranger
a le droit de commercer ou
fabriquer. Pour obtenir
cette autorisation ils doivent
s'adresser au Ministère
des Affaires Étrangères afin
que celui-ci approuve, et
aprouve la signature sur
les documents y relatifs.

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