

# An American Portrait of the Iranian Revolution

Part II: The people govern in the land of the Thousand And One Nights

By T.D. Allman

TEHRAN (PNS)—The wealthy entrepreneur, with large holdings in both manufacturing and agribusiness, had invited a few friends—both Iranian and foreign—to his elegant villa in the hills overlooking the city.

The women wore more diamonds than chadors, and at dinner the conversation was in French. The topic among such a group, was inevitable: how the country was going to the dogs.

"I am a practicing Shi'ite Moslem," one guest declared. "But all this has gone too far. How can one run a modern economy according to laws in the Koran laid down for Arabian nomads 1300 years ago?"

"I was no friend of the Shah," another added. "But look what's happened: disorder everywhere. No government worthy of the name. No discipline. No code of law."

A foreign diplomat sagely nodded, making mental notes of this sounding of Iranian public opinion to report back to his embassy. Finally, the host spoke: "The real question in Iran," he said, "is not Islam, not the chador, not the Koran, not the ban on liquor, not the nationalization, not left versus right. The real question is: Who governs?"

Who governs Iran? For the last six months, this nation of 35 million people has not had a government, army, police force, even a public sanitation department worthy of the name. The entire society and economy—including Iran's crucial Ahwaz and Abadan fields—have been basically unregulated, in the sense that the United States, the Soviet Union or even Saudi Arabia are governed.

Yet the streets, and even the alleys, of Tehran, Mashhad and Esfahan today are cleaner than those of most American cities. And although until recently, the police did not arrest, the public prosecutors did not prosecute, and the secular courts did not imprison criminals even when they were handed over to them, the fear of violent crime that one finds in New York, Bangkok or Beirut simply does not exist here. Though no real apparatus exists to compel them to do it, the left-wing workers in the Iranian oil industry have pumped, refined and exported oil to the United States and other "imperialist" nations for the last six months.

Iranian motor cars and television sets have continued to roll off the assembly lines even though many Iranian managers and almost all foreign experts have left the country. For weeks—following the announced nationalization of the banks—Iran has had a financial system that is at best partly functional. Yet money continues to circulate, and both domestic and foreign trade—especially the import of consumer goods—still thrives, even though many contracts for the importation of exotic American Technology either have been cancelled by the Iranians or gone unfilled by U.S. corporations. While its foreign technicians, pilots and stewardesses all have left everyone agrees Iran Air has a much better on-time record for domestic flights today than when it was run by technocratic principles before the revolution.

All over Iran, the answer to the question of who governs this country is clear. To an extent unthinkable under the Shah and SAVAK, the unknown even today in the constitutional democracies of the advanced industrialized nations, the answer for the last six months has been: The people run Iran—wisely and foolishly, efficiently and destructively, according to the most enlightened and most medieval principles imaginable. It has amounted to an exercise of direct, mass democracy that may well be without parallel anywhere else.

The prevailing assumption abroad, and indeed among many foreigners in Tehran, is that Iran today has fallen under the total control of a single individual who is at best hopelessly incapable, because of his other-worldliness, of efficiently running a nation, at worst a squint-eyed fanatic determined not merely to run Iran back into the middle ages, but to wreck the international economy as well.

One soon discovers, however, that these assumptions have little to do with the way Iran is being run—or rather, is running itself today. Instead one encounters a situation in which the immense moral authority of the Ayatollah is largely unconnected to any administrative apparatus—

and the administrative apparatus of the Iranian state has so little moral authority that some 35 million people obey it or ignore it as they please.

Some examples, both impressive and appalling, of this singular, and largely unappreciated state of affairs:

In Tirash, overlooking the Caspian Sea, the villagers are so wealthy it is difficult to imagine why they had any complaint against the Shah. The village has electricity, televisions, motor bikes, a modern communal bath—the social focus of Iranian village life—that seems to have every amenity except a sauna. But these villagers' grievance was not that the Shah broke with tradition. It was that he did not go far enough, especially in his land reform under the "white revolution," which permitted absentee landlords to keep up to a third of their holdings.

"When the Shah fell," says Ghodrat Ghoulrat, a 21-year-old farmer who wears blue jeans and a mod tee shirt, "we formed a committee and took over all the land. That is what the Islamic Revolution means to us." What about the Koran's support for private property? "Khomeini himself can come to Tirash, and tell us to give it back," he replies. "We won't."

But in the port of Bandar-e-Azili, the visiting American's gratification at Asian peasants taking their destiny into their own hands collides with his environmental concerns. For the fishermen at the Caspian port, the Shah's dictatorship meant strict limits on the caviar catch. Today everyone fishes as he pleases, and so many sturgeon are being caught that beluga caviar is selling locally for only \$8 a pound. Government officials—who are powerless to intervene—fear the sturgeon population,

already endangered, will be so drastically reduced that Iran will lose the fish that lay the golden eggs.

In the mountain village of Noomal, there is real discontent with the local mullah. The problem here, ironically, is that Khomeini's man is too progressive. Not only does 21-year-old Sheik Gorbani Ali Ghandahari wear bell-bottomed trousers instead of religious robes, he also has outraged public decency by giving sermons on such previously forbidden topics as "How To Have A Happy Marriage." The young mullah also has banned wholesale deforestation of the surrounding hills for environmental reasons. "There are many counter revolutionaries in Noomal," the young theorist observes as he mounts his motor bike. "It will undoubtedly be much more difficult to build an Islamic Republic than it was to overthrow the Shah."

Zahedan close to Afghan and Pakistani borders, the local chief of police is sentenced to death for shooting two anti-Shah demonstrators. When a robbed, bearded mullah intervenes from the audience—arguing that the execution won't bring back the dead but may incite ethnic bloodletting—the judges commute the sentence to life imprisonment. Meanwhile, in the town of Nazafarid, workers stage a general strike to protest the leniency of sentences given two accused murderers. The judges receive the protesters and promise to reconsider their verdict.

Even when he is viscerally disgusted by the verdicts of the revolutionary courts—many of which are manifestly unjust by secular standards—the foreign observer must confront a basic truth: Justice-like everything else in Iran, from the caviar catch to sweeping the streets—

today is in the hands neither of philosophers nor kings, but of the people.

What are the results of this mass exercise in popular sovereignty? What happens when democracy is put to the test in a country which is 98 percent Moslem, and at least two-third illiterate—in which there is not the slightest doubt that a clear, if smaller majority believe that sexual offenders should be whipped and killed, that women should be veiled and kept at home, that the nation's immense oil reserve are a sacred sword against the infidel, and that the essence of "freedom" lies not in the right of the individual, but in the right of the majority to impose its will?

Perhaps the essential result was identified by an Iranian when he pointed out that Iran, after the revolution, had become "a country where everything is possible." Iran could become Islam's first truly democratic state; or there could be civil war. Iran might become a Third World model of social justice; or degenerate into a retrograde theocracy. With the energies of the people liberated, Iran might become Asia's second industrial superpower, after Japan; or the oil revenues might just be frittered away.

Even after many weeks and many thousands of miles, the conclusions of an American in Iran may be irrelevant. But they are that all these contingencies are not only possible. They are all likely to occur in different places and at different times. "Freedom," however it is defined, cannot be limited to Shi'ite Moslem, Farsi-speaking males. It is difficult to see how the women, the leftists, above all the ethnic minorities can be put down again, even if some kind of Islamic SAVAK were created. Certainly, if anyone tries, there will be a fight.



Group supports Gates for council

A committee to elect Oly "Jim" Gates has been filed with the City of Portland Auditor's Office. The Committee to Elect Gates has been filed for City Council Position No. 1. This position is currently held by an appointee.

O.J. Gates, Executive Director of the City-County Commission on

Aging since its inception in 1965, has also held various positions on state, national and local commissions.

The committee lists Gerald Caldwell, a Portland banker, as its treasurer. According to committee Chairperson, Dr. Alfred Sugarman, an announcement on Mr. Gates' candidacy will be made on or about the first of the year.

Whatever happens politically, wealth seems sure to be distributed more equitably than in the past. But those Iranians who imagine the contradictions between the Koran and high technology are an illusion as naive as those foreign critics of the Shah who once imagined an Islamic revolution was just another word for the American Bill of Rights. The tensions between the minaret and the refinery tower will not disappear. Indeed, what the revolution showed was that their antithesis has become a permanent, basic dynamic of Iranian life.

For 30 years, America opted for equating Iran with the Shah. For the last six months, the easy caricature of the Ayatollah's beard, robes and

turban has replaced the peacock throne and become the new substitute for real comprehension of Iran. But the truth is much more complex than that an Ayatollah has taken the place of the Shahanshah.

In this land of the thousand-and-one nights, all the genies have broken out of their bottles. After 2500 years of autocracy, after 50 years of "progress" always on someone else's terms, 35 million Iranians not only have tasted freedom. They have held power—over their own street corners and over their own companies—in the palms of their own hands. It surpasses the possible that anyone or anything—no holy man in Qum, no Pentagon contingency plan—will ever be able to put the genies back.



## PRE-HOLIDAY Home Appliance Sale



**\$40 OFF**

Kenmore® 10-stitch free-arm sewing head

Regular \$209.95 **\$169.95**

- Dial-to-sew 5 utility, 5 stretch stitches
- Use the free-arm for cuffs, sleeves, hems
- Easy-to-use built-in buttonholer

Use the "free-arm" for sewing cuffs, hems, set-in sleeves.

Built-in buttonholer. Bar tack style sews almost any size.

**\$60 OFF!**



Stereo with cassette OR 8-track

Choose the system best for you! Each has AM-FM stereo receiver, phono, two speakers.

Reg. \$209.95 **149.95** ea.

**Sears Best**



**Kenmore® Microwave**

Reg. \$599.95 **499.95**

100-min. timer

Cooks a whole meal at one time in big oven and rack. Electronic touch to program cooking, even pre-set recipes, delay cook. Temperature probe.



99901

**\$10 to \$20 OFF**



A. 2168 Reg. \$59.95



B. 2427 Reg. \$59.95



C. 2391 Reg. \$69.95

\*AC-DC, batteries extra

Each of these advertised items is readily available for sale as advertised.

Ask about a Sears Maintenance Agreement on each of these products.

Satisfaction Guaranteed  
or Your Money Back



SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

Where America shops for Value

**PORTLAND**

NE Grand at Irving  
Phone: 238-2311 Park FREE  
Mon. thru Fri. 9:30 AM to 9:00 PM  
Saturday 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM  
Sunday 12:00 AM to 5 PM

**WASHINGTON SQUARE**

Hiway 217 at Greenburg Rd.  
Phone: 620-1510 Park FREE  
Mon. thru Fri. 10:00 AM to 9:30 PM  
Saturday 9:30 AM to 6:00 PM  
Sunday 11:30 AM to 5:30 PM