

## Did the Soviets play a role in founding the Tudeh party in Iran?

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COSROE CHAQUERI

## DID THE SOVIETS PLAY A ROLE IN FOUNDING THE TUDEH PARTY IN IRAN?\*

VARIOUS THESES HAVE BEEN ADVANCED concerning the founding of the Tudeh Party in fall 1941, after the forced abdication of Reza Shah in consequence of Iran's occupation by the Allies in late summer of the same year. There are those who, on ideological grounds and without presenting any evidence, claim that the Tudeh was a Soviet creation.<sup>1</sup> The first known source that attributed the founding of the Tudeh to Soviets, was the SAVAK "historian," Col. 'Ali Ziba'i, who stated that (Rostam) Aliev was present among the "27 founding members" of the Tudeh in September

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\* The author wishes to express his most sincere thanks to the late Mary Dumont for her assistance with the translation of Russian documents.

1. One of the folkloric theses regarding the establishment of the Tudeh Party is that during its first founding meeting Rostam Aliev, later a Soviet Iranologist at Baku, was present. This myth has been propagated by pro- and anti-Tudeh elements. Such a thoughtless thesis is advanced by N. Kianouri, Tudeh's last General-Secretary (1993: 73, 78 – See the bibliography) and S. Zabih ("Communism, II," *Encyclopaedia iranica*, VI (New York: Columbia University, 1992); according to a "confession" in 1994 by Ahmad Ashraf, one of the editors of that publication to this author while he was there too, this information was added by Ashraf with Zabih's consent.) Among the "repentant" pro-Soviet supporters of this inept notion is the interviewer and editor of the *Memoirs of B. Alavi*, H. Ahmadi (Spånga, Sweden, p. 257), who quotes the "repentant" Stalinist Anvar Khameh'i's claim (*Forsat-e bozorg-e az dastraftah* (Tehran, 1984): 21) "that Rostam Aliev of Soviet embassy was present" at the founding meeting of the Tudeh at Solayman Mirza's residence. Admittedly, Khameh'i was still in prison at that date and based his information on what he had heard from "those present" at the founding meeting of the Tudeh (*ibid.*: 22). The said editor who claims to have "verified" this thesis with two other (unnamed) members of the "Fifty-three" put the same question to B. Alavi. The latter rejected this idea as a "lie." Alavi added that it was not improbable that R. Rousta etc. had been in touch with the Russians and had made S. M. Eskandari understand that they had Russian support. As regards this folkloric thesis, it should be noted that Rostam Aliev was born in 1930, and at the time of Tudeh's founding was no older than eleven years old. He entered Leningrad University in 1949. This author personally met Aliev in September 1993 in Baku. He died of a heart attack a couple of years later. A British report in 1943 suggested that the Tudeh Party was founded either in "late 1941 or early 1942." See "Extracts from the Review of the Foreign Press," 182 (16 April 1943), Foreign Office (FO), 371/35061. This means that the British were not either aware of or concerned with the founding of a pro-soviet organization at the beginning.

1941. According to this source, most of those present did not know who Aliev was, and those who did, kept quiet about his identity. Some of those present wanted to call the party “Communist,” but Aliev opposed the idea as “not suitable under the present circumstances.” At last his idea that the party be called “Tudeh” was accepted.<sup>2</sup> Others, on the other hand, mostly of Tudeh leadership, have claimed that the Tudeh was created independently of Soviet wishes. Within this latter group, there are those who have advanced the thesis that the Tudeh was “Communist” from the very start.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it has also been affirmed that the Tudeh was not a Communist Party in the beginning but was gradually transformed into one. Curiously, Iraj Eskandari, First-Secretary of the Tudeh during the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, defended both these theses, albeit at different times in his lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Given the limited space available in this article, it would be impossible to list all these claims and sources; the interested reader is, therefore, referred to the most important works among them.<sup>5</sup> It is important, however, to refer to a work published in the West that has now acquired the stature of “authority” on the history of the Tudeh; it makes the following affirmation on the founding of that organization:

“In launching the organization, the founders [of the Tudeh] gave the party chairmanship to Sulaiman Mirza Eskandari, the highly respected radical prince who had fought in the Constitutional Revolution, helped establish the Democratic party in the Second Majles,<sup>6</sup> led the Committee of National Resistance during World War I,<sup>7</sup> and presided over the Socialist party from 1921 until its dissolution in 1926.”<sup>8</sup>

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2. Col. ‘Ali Ziba’i (1964: 196 ff). This was a book published by a former SAVAK officer who had previously taken part in the 1953 coup and helped the post-coup Military Governor of Tehran, General Bakhtiar, to dismantle the opposition to the shah, particularly the Tudeh Party Military Organization in 1954. The book is a descriptive melange of materials collected from various sources, but unfortunately little from the Iranian archives. The book’s stated purpose is to show how the Workers’, Socialist, and Communist Movement in Iran was an alien body in Iranian society and a tool of a foreign power. The colonel must have been assisted in his task by former Communists as researchers and editors. According to the former Tudeh officer F. Azarnour, Ziba’i, who lives in Colorado, has written his memoirs.

3. A publication of the Tudeh (*Programme. Histoire* (Paris, 1977), pt. I: 1) claims the party was a “continuateur” (successor) of the Iranian Communist Party; the same claim is made by the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister and “adviser” of the Tudeh, N. N. Semenov (N.N. Semionoff, “Trente-cinquième anniversaire du Parti Toudéh d’Iran,” *ibid.*, pt. II: 1). The “proletarian” nature of the Tudeh is also claimed by Gh.-H. Foroutan (1911-1998), a leading Stalinist member of the Tudeh CC who turned pro-Chinese in 1965; he denies even the suggestions by such Tudeh leaders as N. Kianouri that the Soviets had proposed the founding of “popular” party instead of a purely Communist organization. See Foroutan’s memoirs (1992-1993).

4. For his positions in this regard, see C. Chaqueri (1988: 104-105), and his works listed in the bibliography.

5. For a number of contradictory claims, see the bibliography.

6. Historical evidence does not support this claim, although S. M. Eskandari replaced his murdered brother as the parliamentary leader of the Democratic Party. See C. Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian origins of Iranian social democracy in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911* (forthcoming), chap. 6.

7. He belonged to the pro-German faction of the so-called National Government; see C. Chaqueri (1998b).

8. E. Abrahamian (1981: 281 ff.).

The unique, albeit limited, chance of access to consult the Comintern archives in 1992 and 1993 has permitted this author to address this controversial question on the basis of irrefutable documents, particularly in light of contradictory (seasonal) narratives provided by the Tudeh Party itself. What follows is the account of the founding of the Tudeh Party according to documents found in the archives of the Comintern in Moscow. When necessary, occasional reference will be made to published documents. Because of the controversial nature of the issue, long quotations from the documents will be cited.

### **The role of the Soviet Army Intelligence in establishing and shaping the Tudeh**

In a report to his superior in the Red Army Intelligence Division,<sup>9</sup> Brigade Commissar Il'ichev, Colonel Seliukov writes that "according to your wish," he met Solyayman Mirza Eskandari, the veteran Democrat and Socialist. The meeting took place on 29 September 1941 [7 Mehr 1320<sup>10</sup>], at 6 in the evening at his home.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet colonel was introduced to Eskandari by Soviet embassy counselor Petrov, and they spoke for eighty minutes in Russian and Persian, through an interpreter.<sup>12</sup>

After an exchange of customary courtesies, the Red Army Colonel Seliukov asked Eskandari what his opinion was regarding "the current events and the present situation in Iran." His response was that "nothing new had happened" in that country. "We have had nothing similar to the events in Russia [in 1917] when there was a revolution. Here the shah [*sic*, royalty] has remained in place. The Majles and the government are, in fact, the same, and they – for the time being – introduce no improvements for Iran. *Political prisoners have not yet been liberated.*"<sup>13</sup> Solyayman Mirza added that Reza Shah "went away under Russian pressure and the Red Army, and it seems that he departed voluntarily [so that] his son [could] remain in his place."<sup>14</sup>

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9. Col. Seliukov, "Transcription of conversation with Solyayman Mirza," dated 8 November 1941, Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii (RTsKhIDNI), 495/74/192 (hereafter: "Conversation with Solyayman Mirza", 8 Nov. 1941); this report was forwarded by Il'ichev to the Comintern Secretary-General G. M. Dimitrov on 8 November 1941.

10. This is the official date of the founding of the Tudeh. Khameh'i who refers to himself as "one of known Tudeh leaders" between 1941 and 1948 (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 10), but admittedly joined the Tudeh only in August 1944 (*ibid.*: 113) refers both to 29 September and 2 October 1941 (7 and 10 Mehr 1941) as the founding date of the Tudeh (*ibid.*: 21, 44).

11. The Soviet colonel depicts the apartment as having several rooms, "poorly furnished with old furniture and cheap old carpets."

12. The conversation was translated by a certain Erkush.

13. Emphasis in the Russian original.

14. "Conversation with Solyayman Mirza", 8 Nov. 1941.

Here Solayman Mirza obviously was patting his Soviet interlocutor, as the historical fact is that Reza Shah had been forced to abdicate under joint Anglo-Soviet pressure and *did not depart voluntarily*, because of close relations he had continued to maintain with Nazi Germany even after repeated British warnings that German agents had to be expelled from Iran.<sup>15</sup>

In this connection it is, indeed, noteworthy to mention here a significant piece of information regarding the departure of Reza Shah under duress, which has thus far remained untold. Initially, the British did not intend to force the old shah to abdicate; the Soviets did. In a telegram, dated 17 September 1941, to the Quai d'Orsay, the French Minister at Tehran, Coiffard, reported that

“The British, who had feared disturbances, would have preferred to keep the shah on the throne. They had to abandon him upon Russian intransigence. They were afraid of their increasing unpopularity by defending a sovereign already discredited, accused in public rumors of having been their own creation. To ensure themselves of the benefits of this gesture, they then took the initiative of exiling him, and carried on, every night, on the English radio [BBC, Radio Baghdad, and Radio Delhi], a most violent campaign in Persian [against him]. All the exactions of the shah were, for the first time, openly related and through a voice [British radios] that could no longer be silenced. The considerable effects of these programs on the Persian people did not escape the attention of the shah, who last Sunday asked the British legation ‘what is the aim of all this?’ Upon [the receipt of] a British response, the shah, feeling that he had neither the support of the occupying powers nor that of his people, decided to abdicate.”<sup>16</sup>

But because Iran was still nominally a sovereign country, the former shah could not be expelled, unless an official warrant permitted the British authorities to arrest and exile him. This unusual warrant was issued by his son and crown prince, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who had now taken his place as the new shah of Iran.<sup>17</sup> It

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15. Regarding the pro-Nazi propaganda and positions by Reza Shah and his entourage, see India Office Record/L/PS/12/3513 (London) and Archives des Affaires Étrangères (Paris) (hereafter AAE), Asie, Iran, 1930-1940, Doss. 98.

16. AAE, Vichy, 1940-1944, Doss. 288. According to information received by the French from the Turkish embassy, it was after the publication of an article in the official daily *Ettela'at* (10 September 1941) “regretting that the Iranian government was forced to close down the German and Italian legations with which Iran entertained normal economic and political relations,” that the British reached the conclusion that the shah must go. See Coiffard's Report dated 22 September 1941, in AAE, *ibid.*

17. See the German biography of “Mohammed Resa Pahlawi, Schah in Iran” in “Intern. Biog. Archiv,” dated 16 October 1941, Iran A2000, Zentrales Staatsarchiv (Potsdam). The German biographical notes: “Um mit allen Mitteln seinen Thron zu erhalten, unterschrieb er am 20 September 1941 sogar einen Arrestbefehl gegen seinen Vater.” It is important to recall that, while the Soviets at this time supported the idea of establishing a republic in Iran, the British wished to return the Qajar dynasty to the throne. It was only after the meeting in London between Sir Anthony Eden and the son of the last Qajar Crown Prince Mohammed Hasan Mirza, the next Qajar prince in line for kingship, Prince Hamid, that the British decided in favor of Mohammed Reza, because the Qajar candidate turned out to be illiterate in Persian. Regarding the British initial attempt to restore the Qajars and the final decision to install Mohammed Reza Pahlavi as the new shah, see C. Chaqueri, “Pishin-ha-ye Jomhuri...” *Ketab-e Jom'ehha*, 2-3 (1985); FO, 371/27205, /27212, /27184; and Eshraghi, “Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, *Middle East Journal*, 1-3 (1984).

was, therefore, after the issuance of this secret warrant by the crown prince, apparently in exchange for the throne, that Reza Shah was escorted out of Iran by the British forces. It is, however, true that, as S. M. Eskandari stated, the system had remained intact.

Nevertheless, the shah's abdication and expulsion by the Anglo-Soviet forces were favorably received by the Iranian political elite<sup>18</sup> that had been deprived of participation in public affairs, although there was still little hope for any change in the political system. As Soleyman Mirza Eskandari put it to the Soviet Army officer:

“Previously, the shah simply named the Majles and the government, and it is now the same situation. The new Majles [Thirteenth Legislature] and government are composed of men appointed – ballots having been fabricated to suit the young shah.”<sup>19</sup>

Soleyman Mirza told his Soviet interlocutor that

“we the free-thinking men can write nothing in the newspapers. Many people in Tehran thought that, when the Red Army came, platforms would be erected and they would speak freely about everything to the people, and that all the parasites would be arrested. But this did not occur. The constabulary and the police have remained and the government is ruling as in the past, so that many people have lost hope and are afraid to work [politically].”<sup>20</sup>

In response, the Red Army colonel noted – obviously diplomatically – that “freedom and revolution are not exported and that the Iranian people can and must introduce in their country the order and measures they desire.” Encouraging Eskandari personally, he added: “You, M. Soleyman Mirza, are an important statesman and political activist of Iran and know better than anyone else what the Iranian people want and what must be done to improve the situation in Iran, and it would be very good if you acted. The presence of the Red Army here certainly produces and will produce effects as regards the people of Iran and their leaders.”

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18. A view that is confirmed by the French legation at Tehran as well: “Thus the population welcomes his abdication with relief and without regret.” See Coiffard's Report dated 22 September 1941, in AAE, Vichy, 1940-1944, Doss. 288.

19. “Conversation with Soleyman Mirza”, 8 Nov. 1941. British Minister Bullard reported (19 September 1941, FO, 371/27219) that at this time there was a discussion for fresh elections of the Thirteenth Majles which “had begun under the [Reza] Shah's control and that [its] members already returned (just a quorum...) might be considered as the Shah's creature.” But Premier Foroughi and apparently Bullard believed that “to dissolve [the] Majles would involve departure from the Constitution and be an unfortunate precedent” – a “precedent” that was finally amended to the Constitution in 1949 after the new shah's “first coup d'état” in February 1949.

20. “Conversation with Soleyman Mirza”, 8 Nov. 1941.

Then, Solayman Mirza mentioned that a certain X [H?<sup>21</sup>] had created a party which already published its call to the people with the promise of improving the situation. He further told the Soviet officer that,

“Of course, we could also create such a party, but both the police and the constabulary will prevent us from working, whereas no one harms them [the other party], and they use the press freely. It is absolutely clear that we the free-thinking people ourselves will not be able to do anything without your [Soviet] help (he is applying to me). We need help. In general, the historical moment that we now live, at the moment the Red Army is in Iran, must be used for the improvement of the situation in Iran.”

The Soviet Army officer replied that the situation then was “most suitable for the creation of the needed party and that help would be granted to him [Eskandari] in his work if that were not contrary to our [Soviet] interests.” In conclusion, Solayman Mirza declared the following:

“1) We will deal with the organization in order to obtain democratic liberties and an easier life for the Iranian people; and  
2) You [the Soviets] must grant us your assistance in this enterprise and help obtain the liberation of, and the restoration of civil rights to, political prisoners.”<sup>22</sup>

Colonel Seliukov also reported that he and Eskandari had agreed to meet the following day (8 Mehr 1320/30 September 1941) at noon, while Solayman Mirza would meditate a number of questions, and that he “agreed to work with our help.”

The second conversation took place at Eskandari’s home at the arranged time and lasted ninety minutes, continuing the previous day’s conversation. The Red Army colonel “warned Solayman Mirza that no one was to know of our yesterday’s conversation. To this the latter replied by an agreement. As an example, he stated that [some] political prisoners had already applied to him, asking him to request help from the Soviet embassy in the matter of their liberation;<sup>23</sup> he had replied that ‘this is our (Iranian) business, and that the Soviet embassy cannot intervene in it.’”<sup>24</sup>

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21. I have not been able to identify M. “X” (letter Kh in Russian, which could also be a transliteration of Persian H), unless it refers to the Hamrahan Party created by Mostafa Fateh, the Iranian economist, the highest ranking Iranian employee of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, who was later put into relations with the Tudeh and helped, within the framework of Anglo-Soviet entente during the war, to obtain the license for the publication of *Mardom*, the Tudeh Party daily. Curiously, “Hamrahan” in Persian means “Fellow-travelers”!

22. The majority of them were Communists.

23. According to Khomeh’i (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 24) the amnesty law concerning these prisoners was adopted by the parliament on 16 October 1941.

24. It should be noted that as early as 18 September 1941, the Majles had, in private sessions, discussed, *inter alia*, the “liberation of innocent prisoners.” See Bullard to FO, dated 18 September 1941, FO, 371/27219.

Referring to Eskandari's remarks on the previous day regarding the "real order in Iran," the Soviet colonel then said that "it would be well if you [Eskandari] could explain on paper your reasons for dissatisfaction [with the situation] as well as your program for [its] improvement." Eskandari was further told that, since on the same day at four in the afternoon he was going to have a conversation with his supporters with whom he intended to group in a party, he should "state in writing the program of your [proposed] party and what you are going to discuss at this meeting."<sup>25</sup>

Solayman Mirza agreed to do all this, saying that until the creation of the party his supporters would be called "the party group." He then asked the Red Army colonel for his opinion about the name of the group, to which the latter replied: "for the time being [and] in principle the appellation does not have much importance, but we might revert to this question in the future." Then the Soviet officer stated that, while he was "sure of his [Solayman Mirza's] statesmanship and political abilities," "if his work is carried out in a suitable manner and corresponds to our [Soviet] intentions, then it can be trusted that when there will be a change of government, he [Eskandari] can hope to participate in it."

Solayman Mirza noted at this point that he could not participate in the government of the time under Premier M.-A. Foroughi, because one could not hope for any help from it. It would be "a different matter if a new government were formed, in which he would have his supporters enter [too]." When asked about his financial situation, he said: "I have a small income, no more than 250 *toumans* per month. This is sufficient for me. In general, I do not think much about myself; the main thing is the work." He gave the example that when the former Pahlavi Shah wanted to give him a house as a present, or to sell it to him at a low price, he refused it in favor of the Ministry of Education, of which he was in charge. It is clear here that Eskandari rebuffed Soviet financial assistance to himself. He also "frequently said" to his Soviet interlocutor that the people "knew and respected him."

In the course of this second conversation, the Soviet army officer also learned about the invitation extended to Eskandari to the Tenth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1927, his meeting with Stalin and Chicherin then, as well as his past connection with Caucasian revolutionaries some twenty years previously.<sup>26</sup> The

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25. Reportedly, the Soviets had also directly presented the Iranian government with a list of "expected reforms," including the transfer of "Crown" properties to the people, reduction of taxation, with which the British and Premier Foroughi seemed to be in agreement; there were other demands on the Soviet ambassador's list which "aroused the anxiety" of the Premier and his Foreign Minister, namely, "a moderate constitution giving the majority of the population the right to elect [the] Majles" and "a minimum of local self-government." See Bullard to F.O., dated 19 September 1941, FO, 371/27219.

26. Solayman Mirza had been one of the few non-Communist Iranians invited to that event (see C. Chaqueri (1998b)). Some of the others were the journalists 'Ali Dashti and Farrokhi Yazdi, both of whose newspapers had been subsidized, along with Solayman Mirza's Socialist Party, by the Soviets in the early 1920s. In June 1923 Soviet envoy in Iran Shumiatskii was reported to have paid a number of pro-Soviet newspapers editors: Lesani for *Kar*, 150 *toumans*; 'A. Dashti, for *Shafaq-e Sorkh*, 160 *toumans*; and Mohammed Vosouq Homayouni, some 100 *toumans* for *Paykar*; the Socialist Party of Solayman Mirza Eskandari received 2,000 *toumans*. (See "Intelligence Summary," 23 (19 June 1923); 31 (4 August 1923), in FO, 416/73.) Even as late



Soviet officer “politely” asked him to write down his autobiography. At the end of the conversation Col. Seliukov reminded Eskandari that he “must write down” the following before their next meeting:

- a) His attitude towards the prevailing conditions and government in Iran;
- b) His views regarding the change of conditions that would satisfy the demands of the Iranian people;
- c) The program of his party and the questions discussed on 30 September during the meeting of his supporters at his home;
- d) His autobiography.”<sup>27</sup>

The next meeting with Soleyman Mirza was to take place on 6 October (14 Mehr), but they met with a five-day delay, on 11 October 1941 (19 Mehr 1320).<sup>28</sup> At this encounter, Eskandari informed the Soviet colonel that the program he had handed to him through his associates had been sent to newspaper editors for publication, but the press had refused to print it. His intention was to send it to all editorial staffs in the country and if they refused to publish it [too], he would go to the speaker of the Majles to ask him what kind of press freedom there existed in Iran when a democratic party had no possibility to publish its program. He intended to ask him permission to print the party program, as it was “time to make public [the existence of] our party, so that the Iranian people might know about it, so that all might know about the existence of the national-democratic party of Iran and be acquainted with its program.”

Then asked by the Soviet officer whether this opinion was personal or shared by the whole group, Eskandari responded that this was “the opinion of the plenum and presidium of our party”—incidentally, not as yet called Tudeh—which, made up of fifteen individuals, had been elected on 10 October 1941 (18 Mehr 1320<sup>29</sup>). When questioned in what measure the Iranian people were supporting the party, Eskandari stated that: “I am sure that the Iranian people will come with us. We can now count on 2,000 to 2,500 supporters in Tehran.” The Red Army officer told Eskandari that, having acquainted himself with his party program, he could tell him that “essentially, it is in accordance with our opinion and corresponds to the present conditions in Iran.”<sup>30</sup> As to its publication and the legalization of the party, the

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as 1929 British ambassador Clive reported from Tehran to Henderson at the Foreign Office (16 July 1929; FO, 316/85) that Taymourtash had, in response to his inquiry whether Iranian Communists had any influence in relations with Moscow, stated that Soleyman Mirza, though living in Tehran and “fairly harmless,” “no doubt... still had communication with Moscow.”

27. “Conversation with Soleyman Mirza”, 8 Nov. 1941.

28. The delay may have been due to the Soviet anticipation that the party executive would be elected on 10 October.

29. Khameh’i (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 22) says that the program was adopted on 29 September, not 10 October 1941.

30. The British embassy report on the first General Conference of the Tudeh Party (held at Tehran from 1st to 12th August 1944) was that the “moderation” of the Tudeh program was “clearly dictated by the tactical needs of the party in its struggle for power rather than ideological considerations.” British Embassy Report dated 26 August 1944, FO, 371/40187.

officer added, he needed time “to reflect” upon them before expressing his opinion. These questions were “unexpected” for him, since at the previous meeting they had spoken of “the necessity for you and future manifestations, to increase [your] forces, to reinforce and educate the party, as well as to study the strengths and weaknesses of the present government and the Majles.” Clearly, the Soviets did not wish to rock the boat of alliance with the British etc.

As if the Soviets had manifested dissatisfaction about some points of the program, Solayman Mirza pointed out: “We changed the points on our program regarding the question of the police and the nationalization [of landed properties], so as not to be accused of desiring disorder and sovietization. Regarding the police it is changed as follows: ‘All those who infringe on liberty will be punished by law.’ And the point regarding the nationalization of land is approximately thus: ‘Poor peasants must be supplied with land.’” The program Seliukov transmitted to Moscow did not contain the point on the police; it must have been dropped on Soviet advice. Solayman Mirza added that “some of my supporters think that I am restraining them too much, but they are mistaken. I understand the present situation quite well.” As if he knew the Soviet popular front tactics, he symbolically added: “I have kept the portraits of Marx and Lenin, but it is not the time to put them out even in this room. When the (suitable) time comes, they will be placed in my room.”

Then the Soviet officer informed Eskandari that he would give him his answers in two days. This delay did not mean, however, that the Soviets “forbade” him to “act independently” or he should “limit” his activity, “which for the time being coincides with our position.” Solayman Mirza reminded the Red Army officer that there were

“some hot-blooded, impatient members [of the party] who demand immediate manifestation of Communist and Soviet slogans. For instance, [Reza] Rousta<sup>31</sup> asks for immediate demonstrations and meetings. He openly says that the Soviet embassy will support us, that we will be supported with money, and that in the near future a new government of Iran will be formed comprising six supporters of the USSR and six of Britain. Rousta presents himself as Communist and clearly as a person sent by the Soviet embassy. His declarations introduce conflict into our party, and I would ask you to help me preserve unity in our party.”

Regarding Reza Rousta, the Soviet Red Army officer replied that “we [*sic*, you] are a national party which must win over the majority of the people and then appoint its representative in the government, and we [you] will be able to do this.”<sup>32</sup>

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31. A Communist trained at the Communist University for Workers of the Orient (Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka – KUTV), imprisoned under Reza Shah, and later the leader of the Tudeh-led labor unions until 1949. He died in exile in the late 1960s.

32. “Conversation with Solayman Mirza”, 8 Nov. 1941.

The following meeting between the Soviet officer Seliukov and S. M. Eskandari took place on 15 October 1941 (23 Mehr 1320), lasting thirty minutes through an interpreter. S. M. Eskandari informed his Soviet interlocutor that from the Majles he had received the authorization for the publication of the party's program, of which 1,000 copies would be printed. After its diffusion, he would endeavor to obtain a permission to publish his own party organ. He did not elaborate on the composition of the editorial staff of his party organ, but mentioned a number of individuals who, in his opinion, would be able to edit the paper. He also intended to obtain in the near future a place for his party club. Then the Soviet colonel was also informed that Eskandari had made the acquaintance of the Qashqa'i tribal leader Naser Khan, who resided in Abadeh in the vicinity of Shiraz. Soleyman Mirza wished to include him in the party as well.<sup>33</sup>

The Soviet Army officer, Col. Seliukov, reported to his superiors that "I approved of his [Eskandari's] line of conduct concerning the publication of his program and the legalization of the party, obtaining a press organ, as well as a club for the party." At the same meeting, the Soviet officer drew Eskandari's attention to the fact "that at present his party has the task of bringing together all the democratic forces and to struggle against all kinds of leftist attitudes inside the party, such as those of Rousta. As to Rousta, no one in the [Soviet] embassy had authorized him to establish connection with the party, much less advise such [radical] conditions." Colonel Seliukov further advised Eskandari that "if Soleyman Mirza knows Rousta well, [as] he had so stated, and is sure that he is not an adventurer," Eskandari should "try to persuade him of mistakes in his outlook and proposals. [For] it is not advisable to push away [individuals with] leftist attitudes, but their mistaken positions must be insistently explained to them."<sup>34</sup>

As agreed previously, Eskandari and Seliukov next met in a week's time, on 22 October 1941 (30 Mehr 1320) at 7.30 in the evening. The conversation, through an interpreter named Ebrahim, lasted forty minutes. Soleyman Mirza informed his Soviet interlocutor that two days previously he had received a visit from a police colonel who had warned him that he knew some people (that is, the party) were gathering at Eskandari's place, and that because of the war situation such meetings were prohibited. Eskandari added that "today the military governor published a declaration prohibiting gatherings, a declaration that was aimed at my party." Eskandari further noted that they had had no time yet to print their program. Although a permit had been received, no more than ten copies of it had been printed before the police confiscated them. On the same day a "congress of the party" had been held. Participants had gathered in a different place, not all arriving at the same time, ostensibly due to police controls. They decided to print the program in the

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33. It should be noted that the Qashqa'is, like Eskandari himself, had had pro-German leanings and had collaborated with the Reich during World War I. See Chaqueri (1998b and 1995: 53, 86-87).

34. "Conversation with Soleyman Mirza", 8 Nov. 1941.

Arak region (central Iran).<sup>35</sup> In addition, Eskandari “told his companions what Roustā, who presented himself as the representative of the [Soviet] embassy, [really] was.” Eskandari further informed his Soviet interlocutor that he had received, five days previously, an invitation from Mohammed Reza Shah to attend at the Gulistan Palace the birthday celebration of the new shah. He had turned down the invitation.<sup>36</sup>

Regarding the government ban on meetings, Soleyman Mirza intended to send a protest to the premier and wished to know Col. Seliukov’s opinion about it. The Red Army officer responded that “the situation had taken a wrong turn as regards his party,” but this did not mean “that they had to deplore it.” “On the contrary, work must be continued with even greater energy, increasing the number of supporters.” As to the protest letter to the premier, the Soviet officer remarked there was “nothing I could say for the time being as to the form in which it should be done.” In other words, he wanted, as on previous occasions, to obtain instructions from his superiors about it.<sup>37</sup> At this meeting the Soviet officer repeated his request for Eskandari’s autobiography.

The Soviet officer met S. M. Eskandari again on 11 November 1941 (20 Aban 1320), this time only for thirty minutes. Eskandari told his Red Army interlocutor that “at the last meeting of his party the question was raised as to the absolute necessity of connection with the embassy of the USSR.” Soleyman Mirza added: “As they do not know about our connection, I did not tell them about it [either] and declared that we must work on our own. Then, at the same meeting a question was raised about the organization of groups in the regions occupied by the Red Army.” Eskandari told his Soviet connection:

*“We want to send our representatives to such cities as Ahvaz, Tabriz, Pahlavi [Anzali], Rasht, Gorgan, Mashhad, and other regions occupied by the Red Army in order to organize, on a legal basis, sections of our party.”*<sup>38</sup> But I am afraid to hamper your work in these regions. For this reason, I am seeking your advice in this respect. I have already sent two individuals to Tabriz, and they are asking [me] what to do. *I have replied that they must wait.*<sup>39</sup>

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35. Apparently, the program of the Tudeh was first published in Arak, as *Siasat*, the organ of the organization stated on 24 July 1942 that “the aims of the Tudeh Party of Arak” were “the independence of Persia, struggle against reaction and dictatorship, and the strengthening of the fundamental laws of the country.” See “Extracts from the Review of the Foreign Press,” 182 (16 April 1943), FO, 371/35061.

36. This attitude was not to last for long, as Soleyman Mirza finally met with the shah. For instance, in late August 1943 the shah told the British diplomat that he had just had a “satisfactory talk” with Soleyman Mirza, and that he was about to see Qawam al-Saltaneh, who had also expressed a wish to see him. See “Minutes” recorded by a British diplomat on 1 September 1943, in FO, 248/1427.

37. “Conversation with Soleyman Mirza”, 8 Nov. 1941.

38. Emphasis in the Russian original.

39. Emphasis in the Russian original.

Further, responding to the Seliukov's question, Eskandari remarked that "in southern Iran he has several men and that he intends to organize his groups there too." Having had to check this latter point with his superior too, Col. Seliukov told Solyman Mirza that "this was a good idea and that I will be able to reply to this question in a few days."

The Soviet officer concluded his conversation with Eskandari by insisting that "one of the main problems of Solyman Mirza's party is to increase the number of his supporters and to educate Iranians in the democratic spirit." The officer also reported that Eskandari could print and distribute no more than "sixty to seventy" copies of his program.<sup>40</sup>

In a subsequent conversation with Solyman Mirza Eskandari, held, as agreed previously, in presence of Soviet interpreter Kommissarov, on 13 November 1941 (22 Aban 1320), the Iranian politician first informed the Soviet officer of the following:

"Two days previously [20 Aban 1320] Solyman Mirza had visited the Iranian Premier, Foroughi,<sup>41</sup> who had asked him his opinion about the new Majles and its composition. Solyman Mirza had rejected this Majles 'as not new' and no elections had taken place. Agreeing to speak to each other, not as politicians, but as 'friends,' the Premier had alluded to Reza Shah, who had just abdicated, as 'the cause of Iran's misfortunes.' Concurring with Foroughi, Eskandari had asked him why not remove all the other 'causes,' such as the practical ban on free press. To this Premier Foroughi had replied: 'It is impossible to allow full press freedom, for every [past or present] minister would want to publish a newspaper, and they would be over two-hundred,' and given the situation in Iran under Allied occupation and with the presence of a German Fifth Column, the publication of such newspapers 'might inadvertently harm us.'"

Then in reply to Eskandari's demand for a newspaper, Premier Foroughi had said that he "will think it over and will be able to give a reply in thirty days," that is, "if I remain Prime Minister."<sup>42</sup>

Further relating his conversation with Premier Foroughi on the type of government Iran should have and the liberty of political parties in democratic

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40. [Col. Seliukov,] "Transcription of conversation with Solyman Mirza," sent on 8 December 1941 by Brigade Commissar Il'ichev, Chief of the Intelligence Department of the Red Army to the Comintern General-Secretary Com. Dimitrov, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192. When forwarding the above report by Col. Seliukov to G. M. Dimitrov on 8 December 1941, Brigade Commissar Il'ichev asked him "to inform him of the possibility of transferring to a more competent person with regard to the work effected by him in Iran." (*ibid.*) This means that a person with more experience in Iranian affairs was now needed to "guide" S. M. Eskandari and his party.

41. Foroughi, a pro-British politician who had previously served Reza Shah, had fallen into disfavor with him. He was invited to take over the reigns of power after the abdication of Reza Shah.

42. According to Khameh'i (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 25, 36), the first issue of the Tudeh organ *Siasat* was published on 22 February 1942 (3 Esfand 1320) and the "anti-fascist" daily *Mardom*, on 31 January 1942 (11 Bahman 1320).

countries, Eskandari noted that Foroughi had wanted him to present a 15-point program within fifteen days and, “if suitable,” he would permit it to function. As regards the law proscribing political party activities, Premier Foroughi had assured Eskandari: “Never mind, we will arrange this somehow.”

Second, S. M. Eskandari said that he had received a letter from [A.-A.] Sartipzadeh<sup>43</sup> and [A.-Q.] Asadi<sup>44</sup> (his supporters he had dispatched to Tabriz) that “*a party had been organized in Azerbaijan, or was being organized, and Asadi did not know what his attitude should be towards that party.*” (See further below.) These two had also asked Eskandari whom he would recommend to stand for the Majles election from Tabriz. Solayman Mirza “expressed the opinion that this party [in Azerbaijan] must be a democratic one, but he was not so sure [it was]; he wanted his Soviet interlocutor to tell him what kind of party it was and “whether it was suitable for his men to establish contact with it.”<sup>45</sup> Eskandari added that “in general, in the northern regions we must work in contact (*v kontakte*) [with the Soviets]; then that will be more advantageous (*togda budet bol'she pol'zy*).”

The Soviet officer then reported to his superior that “I approved of his [Eskandari's] visit to the Prime Minister and noted the necessity of closer relations with the government and the Majles in order to study their strengths and weaknesses, to inform me about these points, and to influence them” – a line that was in accord with the Anglo-Soviet war collaboration. Regarding the northern regions under Red Army occupation, “I recommended [to Eskandari] to abstain from organizing his group there so long as I have not studied the question well. With regard to the party that is being organized in Azerbaijan and [Eskandari's] relations with it, I replied nothing and promised to deal with it in detail at the next meeting,” presumably after consultation with Moscow. Col. Seliukov concluded his conversation by “recommending to Solayman Mirza to increase his influence in southern and western Iran,” which were important British zones of influence and rich in oil. At the end of this report to his superiors in the Intelligence Division of the Soviet Army, Col. Seliukov made two recommendations:

“1) Through the intermediary of Solayman Mirza it is possible *to organize a party [as] a single anti-fascist front.*<sup>46</sup> Through this party we could have the possibility of influencing very strongly the government and the Majles. [This was, from the very outset, tantamount to a very conscious instrumentalization of

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43. An old Social Democrat, said to have been a collaborator of the Iranian Communist Party (ICP) in Tabriz in the 1920s. According to a report by the British consul (dated 9 July 1943, FO, 248/1149), Sartipzadeh was, on the eve of the elections for the 14th Majles, being supported by the “pro-German *Sahand* newspaper.” This was unlikely; see further below.

44. A veteran Social Democrat and member of the ICP, who had been excluded from the ICP, but remained pro-Soviet and whose daughter was sent to Iran from Moscow as a Comintern “agent” in early 1942; see further below.

45. Apparently, this was a party organized by Baqerov, President the Azerbaijan SSR, with an Azeri chauvinist bent, on the basis of which the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan was created in 1945. See further below.

46. Emphasis in the Russian original.

Tudeh by Soviet foreign policy.] The party would unite all the parties and groups and would work under the leadership of Soleyman Mirza.

Since the government wants to have [i.e., allow the existence of] a party, it is possible to organize an anti-fascist party after having overcome certain difficulties.

2) Distinct groups of Soleyman Mirza's party in the regions occupied by the Red Army should be submitted to the organization [in the Soviet Army?] of the Central Committee of [the Communist party in Soviet] Azerbaijan."<sup>47</sup>

Thus within six weeks, between 29 September and 13 November 1941, the Soviets guided Soleyman Mirza Eskandari and his associates to create an organization that would not only respond to a desire of a part of Iranian society for political activity on the center left, but also, and more importantly, to shape politically motivated Iranians of the same tendency to establish an "anti-fascist front" that would serve Soviets war needs on the political level in Iran and, eventually, their postwar interests. The recommendations by Col. Seliukov to his superiors, the program of the "party group," which found approval in Dimitrov's letter to Stalin, V. M. Molotov, L. P. Beria, and G. M. Malenkov (see below), and Stalin's approval as formulated in Dimitrov's instructions to its Iranian agents – Artashes Avanesian and Reza Rousta – shaped not only the policies of the "party group," which was to be renamed the "Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran" before Dimitrov's letter was sent to Stalin on 9 December 1941 (18 Azar 1320), but also strongly influenced the destiny of the Iranian left and Iranian national politics for the next four decades.<sup>48</sup>

### **The role of other Soviet authorities in founding the Tudeh**

In the meantime, an NKVD official called Fitin,<sup>49</sup> wrote to Dimitrov on 5 November 1941 (14 Aban 1320) informing him of the developments concerning the formation of the Tudeh (Popular)<sup>50</sup> Party in Tehran. According to Fitin's account, some 100 members and sympathizers of the Iranian Communist Party (ICP) had been released from prison or exile. Six Communist activists had constituted "a guiding kernel" to work "under the cover of the so-called Popular Party of Soleyman Mirza." This "kernel" was composed of Artashes Avanesian, Reza Rousta, Iraj

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47. Col. Seliukov, "Transcription of conversation with Soleyman Mirza," dated [?] December 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

48. Although aware of the "extent to which the Soviet authorities are interested in the fortunes of the party" (British Embassy Report dated 26 August 1944, FO, 371/40187), the British did not seem to have the slightest inkling that the Soviets had actually created it. This is a clear refutation of the pervasively held thesis in Iran that the British always knew what happened in Iran.

49. According to information supplied to this author by an old historian of the CPSU archives in Moscow Fitin had been an NKVD cadre.

50. This is the first time the name Tudeh is mentioned in the Soviet documents.

Eskandari, Morteza Yazdi, Mohammed Bahrami, and Reza Radmanesh, a short biographical notice of each of whom was sent by Fitin to Dimitrov.<sup>51</sup>

Fitin informed Dimitrov that the last five had entered the composition of the 15-member “unofficial Central Committee” of the Tudeh Party. The program of the Tudeh was of “bourgeois-democratic and anti-fascist content.” The program of the “underground Communist Party at present” was:

- “1 – Verification of the composition of the [Tudeh] party, its purge of suspects, provocateurs, and Trotskyists;
- 2 – Reinforcement of its [Communist party] influence within the Popular party, so as to carry out under its cover the tasks elaborated in its program;
- 3 – Creation of party centers in localities, especially in Azerbaijan, organizers having already been sent to Tabriz, Reza’iyeh [Urmia], Sarab, Rasht, and Mashhad.”

Fitin further informed Dimitrov that the activity of the new Communist leadership proceeded slowly because its members had been “disconnected” from the life of the country by imprisonment, and that for fear of repression, they were acting “timidly,” as it was known that the police was watching the activists of the Communist Party. Fitin also noted that, in order to infiltrate the new Communist group, particularly its leadership, the British attempted, through their men and particularly the leader of the Liberal Party, Mostafa Fateh,<sup>52</sup> to establish contact with various Communist activists, offering them material support, arranging employment for them etc.<sup>53</sup> Fitin informed Dimitrov that “our [NKVD] cadres in Iran” had discussed the matter with some leading Communists, given them “certain advice resulting from the prevailing conditions [in Iran], and granted them important material help.” Dimitrov was further advised that at the last session of the Provincial Bureau of the “Communist Party” in Tehran, “an application” for membership in the Comintern had been elaborated “with the demand for instructions for further work. It was asked to send the reply through our [NKVD] cadres.” Artashes Avanesian had been designated for contact with the Comintern.

Fitin also let Dimitrov know that “side by side with a highly secret [“conspiratorial” in Russian] relation of our cadres with the representatives of the Communist Party

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51. The first two had been members of the ICP and confirmed Stalinists, who had been in Reza Shah’s prison in the 1930s; the last four had been arrested in 1937 and tried in 1938 as members of the Communist group called the “Fifty-three.”

52. The party was called Hamrahan. Fateh had been educated in the US and was one of the rare Iranian managers of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was nationalized by Iranian Premier Mosaddeq in 1951.

53. The two notoriously known cases are those of Bozorg Alavi, the Tudeh novelist (d. 1997, Berlin), and Ehsan Tabari (d. 1989, Tehran), later its ideologue, who worked for Victory House under the British embassy officer Miss Ann K. S. Lambton, but were later forced by the Soviets to resign and work for the Irano-Soviet Cultural Society and the TASS agency, respectively. The Comintern man in the Tudeh Party, Ardashir Avanesian, recalls in his unpublished memoirs (1973-1975) his efforts to “persuade” the two mentioned above to abandon their work in Victoria House and to work for the Russians in Tehran.



and the Popular [Tudeh] Party, a contact is maintained with the latter through uninvestigated and dubious individuals of *polpred* [embassy] and the military attaché of the USSR in Iran, which might compromise the party in view of [their] lack of [necessary] secretiveness in contact.”<sup>54</sup>

While these discussions were taking place between various Soviet organs themselves, Iranian Communist playwright A.-H. Noushin addressed a letter, in mid-November 1941, through the Comintern General-Secretary G.M. Dimitrov, to the Iranian Communist Morteza Alavi,<sup>55</sup> transmitting the “greetings of Iranian prisoners,” such as Bozorg Alavi and Mohammed Bahrami, “to those [Iranian comrades] in the USSR.” This was obviously an attempt to encourage the return to Iran of the Iranian Communists who had been resident in the Soviet Union since the late 1920s and the early 1930s, unaware of what had happened to a large number of them during the purges.

Once the question of the presence of Iranian Communists in the Soviet Union was raised by Noushin, the Cadres Section of the Comintern provided information on the following Iranian Communists who were still being held by the NKVD: M. Akhundzadeh, Hasan Hasanov (Pourafar), A.-H. Hesabi (Dehzad), Kamran (N. Aslani), Ladbon Esfandiari, Mir A.-Q. Asadi,<sup>56</sup> K. Nikbin, and H. Rezaev (Sharqi).<sup>57</sup> The Director of the Cadres Section of the Comintern, Guliaev,<sup>58</sup> noted in his letter to Dimitrov that “the majority” of those to whom the greeting from Iranian prisoners were addressed were “being repressed by the organs of the NKVD.” Guliaev remarked that there was “nothing astonishing” about the greetings from the Tehran prison, because B. Alavi or M. Bahrami “cannot know what [had] happened to their former party comrades.”

Guliaev, Director of the Cadres Section of the Comintern, recommended to Dimitrov that:

*“[It] would be desirable to put up to the NKVD leadership the question of hastening the re-examination of cases of certain Iranians arrested in 1937 and 1938, and those of Kamran and Hesabi with priority, in whose personal records*

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54. Fitin to Dimitrov, dated 5 November 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192. This last remark about the Soviet military attaché apparently alluded to the complaint by S. M. Eskandari about Rousta mentioned above. Fitin’s remark also reveals the multiplicity of Soviet contacts with their supporters in Iran, on the one hand, and the rivalry between different Soviet organizations in Iran, on the other.

55. The actual letter by Noushin was not in the relevant Comintern files consulted.

56. He was already back in Iran and working with Eskandari (see above); whether before the occupation of Iran or thereafter, it is not known.

57. Most Iranian Communists had perished in the purges; a few such as the Communist poet A.-Q. Lahouti, had been living in exceptional comfort in Moscow or in the Asiatic republics, no doubt due to their collaboration with the Soviet secret police against their compatriots persecuted by the NKVD. For a sympathetic view of Lahouti’s life in Moscow, see E. Tabari (1997: 119 ff).

58. Letter dated 21 November 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

*there are many positive reports as to their work in the conditions of Iranian underground.*"<sup>59</sup>

In connection with Noushin's "suggestions about sending members of the ICP from the USSR to Iran" or calling representatives of Iranian Communists to Ashkkabad "to discuss" the question of the re-establishment of the ICP, the Comintern Cadres Section considered it "essential to hurry the departure of [other] comrades prepared for work in Iran [see below], supplying them with appropriate instruction." Independently of the departure of such groups, "it would be useful *to summon to the ECCI [Executive Committee of the Communist International] comrades Reza Roustā (Farhad) and Artashes Avanesian,*<sup>60</sup> or possibly both, to receive from them detailed information regarding the situation in Iran, especially about the cadres of the CP who are reassembling again after liberation from prison." Guliaev added that according to the material in the Comintern archives,<sup>61</sup> both "*Avanesian and Roustā [had] behaved in prison as the most firm comrades,*"<sup>62</sup> i.e., had been most faithful to the Soviet line under Stalin.<sup>63</sup> The Cadres Section also pointed out that it was "essential" to inform Iranian Communists that "their idea" of joining the leadership of the Tudeh Party of Solayman Mirza as a legal cover "deserves approval."

Guliaev, recalling Solayman Mirza Eskandari's reputation among the "radical, democratic, and nationalist circles" and his past "struggle for democratic change in Iran," further underlined that his party could "become the center of attraction for all progressive elements in Iranian society," thereby helping the Communists "prepare the basis for the mobilization of Iranian masses according to the platform of the struggle against the threat of bloody Hitlerism and for friendship with the peoples of the USSR, as well as that of a struggle for the democratic rights of the people of Iran and the improvement of material conditions of workers."

As regards the problem of the "Committee of the Iranian People," formed by Iranian Communists recently released from prison, such as Avanesian and Roustā, as well as the re-establishment of the ICP "in the present complex situation in Iran, and in such a case, in what organizational form," on 21 November 1941 Guliaev still found it "very hard" to make a "definite judgment." He, therefore, recommended it as "necessary to receive urgently the fullest possible information about the

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59. Emphasis in the Russian original. It seems that the Communists mentioned on this list were executed within a few months, "understandably," because they could not have been returned to Iran with the likelihood that they would turn "Trotskyist" or "agent-provocateur" of the British!

60. Emphasis in the original. This means that Avanesian or Roustā had not, by 21 November 1941, been in contact with the Comintern, but Roustā had been in relation with a member of Soviet embassy staff, Blosshapkin, about whose lack of secretiveness Fitin reported on 5 November to Dimitrov (see above).

61. These files were not available to this researcher during the two research visits to the RTsKhIDNI. It would be interesting to know who made these reports too.

62. Almost all accounts by Communists in Reza Shah's prisons relate the active defense of these two of Stalin's line against L. Trotsky and other rivals of Stalin.

63. This certainly means that the Soviet authorities had informers in prison other than Communists who kept them abreast of the conduct of Communist prisoners.

direction and forms of the movement that was developing under the new regime [*sic, shah*] in Iran, the newly established parties and social groups, as well as their influence among the Iranian masses.” Furthermore, he found it:

“more useful under the present conditions to direct the energy of Iranian Communists, not toward the re-establishment of the Communist Party, but – primarily –towards the creation and reinforcement of a wider popular party with the participation and active role of Iranian Communists, acting within the framework of this party, and with a single political line agreed upon with the leadership of the ECCI. In such a case, Iranian Communists would act *as a Communist fraction in the framework* of the Popular [Tudeh] Party, but they would have to be covered by some other designation, corresponding to the legal block of the left national elements.”<sup>64</sup>

Recalling that under Reza Shah even the “Iranian bourgeoisie” had not enjoyed the right to an organization of its own, and that the ICP, leading an underground existence until 1936, was supported by no more than “very limited strata of workers,” Guliaev recommended that Iranian Communists, working within the framework of the Tudeh Party and reinforcing their position in it, “must work, with redoubled energy, at the establishment of labor unions and peasant organizations, thereby laying the basis for the re-establishment of a strong, influential Communist Party.” The Cadres Section of the Comintern considered it “as absolutely essential to ensure the possibility of discussing these questions before the departure of the Iranian group,”<sup>65</sup> namely four individuals it had designated to oversee or control Communist activity in Iran (see below).

### Comintern’s instructions

Once the program took shape, on 9 December 1941 (18 Azar 1320)<sup>66</sup> Dimitrov informed Stalin, and his closest associates at the time (Molotov, Beria, and Malenkov), asking no doubt for the Soviet leader’s approval of the Comintern united front program against the fully Communist initiative of such individuals as Avanesian and Roustā. Because of its historical significance, this letter is quoted in full:

“The group of Iranian Communists, formerly political prisoners undertook the re-establishment of the Iranian Communist Party. They created a provisional bureau, appointed one comrade, Artashes Avanesian, for contact with the ECCI and are applying to us [the Comintern] for instruction. They also sought our agreement to send their delegate to us. According to the material of the Cadres

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64. Emphasis in the Russian original.

65. Guliaev to Dimitrov, letter dated 21 November 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

66. This was more than two months after the date officially declared on which the Tudeh is said to have been founded.

Section of the ECCI and on the basis of the information [provided by] NKVD cadres, who are in contact with them locally [in Tehran], it can be considered that these Iranian Communists are absolutely honest revolutionaries and pro-Soviet individuals. At the same time, the Popular Party [Hezb-e Tudeh] has been created in Iran by the militant democrat Solayman Mirza [Eskandari], with a democratic program. For the last thirty years [Solayman] Mirza has been leading the struggle for the democratic transformation in Iran. A group of Iranian Communists are participating in this Popular Party.

Taking into consideration the special conditions in Iran (occupation together with the British, demagogic and subversive activity by Hitlerites and their agents, as well as the distrustful and hostile attitude of a part of Iran's ruling circles [towards the Soviets], we consider that the re-establishment of the Iranian Communist Party, which always was a small sectarian group,<sup>67</sup> will hardly be useful at the present time and will certainly cause difficulties and complications. This [initiative] will reinforce suspicion and dissatisfaction in the ranks of Iran's ruling circles, enabling German agents to frighten the Iranian bourgeoisie with the possibility of sovietization of Iran, and the British themselves will suspect the Soviet Union more of attempting, in their view, to sovietize Iran."

For these reasons, Dimitrov went on, "I consider that in the present circumstances one should not recreate the Communist Party and [Iranian] Communists must work within the Popular [Tudeh] Party" along the following lines:

- "a – To struggle for the democratization of Iran;
- b – To defend the interests of workers;
- c – To reinforce friendly relations between Iran and the Soviet Union;
- d- – To eliminate completely the fascist agency in Iran and to abolish anti-Soviet propaganda [there].

Together with this [agenda], Communists must work for the establishment of professional [labor] unions and peasant organizations. I also consider it useless for Iranian Communist to send a delegate to us [at the Comintern]. Instead, we would dispatch our suitable comrades under an appropriate legal cover. He could help Iranian comrades to carry out this line [of work]. Unless otherwise instructed by you, I plan to advise Iranian comrades along this line."<sup>68</sup>

There is little doubt that the response by Stalin,<sup>69</sup> or one of his close associates, was positive, since only a week later Dimitrov addressed a letter to Artashes Avanesian, instructing him how Iranian Communists should conduct themselves, exactly according to his program submitted to Stalin and within the new circumstances:

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67. The ICP was founded in 1920, and its leaders were, from the outset, always critical of Soviet policy in Iran. Their critique cost the lives of the most knowledgeable and experienced among them during the Stalinist purges. See C. Chaqueri (1992 and forthcoming).

68. Letter by G.M. Dimitrov "To Stalin, Molotov, Beria, and Malenkov," RTsKhidNI, 495/74/192.

69. Stalin's response was not found in the Comintern archives, because, I was told, all his correspondence is deposited in the Presidential Archives at the Kremlin, to which access by historian has been denied thus far.

“The ECCI considers that in the present situation we should not re-establish the Iranian Communist Party. Communists must work in the Popular Party of Soleyman Mirza [Eskandari]. Their task is to pursue a firm, sustained line in: a) struggling for the democratization of Iran; b) defending the interests of Iranian workers; c) reinforcing friendly relations between Iran and the Soviet Union; d) destroying completely the agency of fascism in Iran and frustrating anti-Soviet propaganda. It must be endeavored to unite all the democratic and progressive elements in Iran on the basis of this platform. Together with this endeavor, Communists must work for the creation of labor unions and peasant organizations to defend the daily interests and demands of workers and peasants.

At the present stage we must not display socialist and Soviet slogans; we must not abandon the framework of democratic platform. It is necessary to carry out propaganda, explanatory work in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, especially among the young generation of Iran, but carefully and prudently. A few active Communists, honest and fully scrutinized [filtered by the NKVD], entering into the Popular [Tudeh] Party must be linked together – but not openly – so as to be able to put into work the policy outlined above. It is absolutely essential to establish the most friendly relations with Soleyman Mirza. At present, I consider it not useful for you to send a representative to the USSR. Such an arrival would be made use of by [our] enemies and would harm your work. Keep us regularly informed of the situation in Iran and of the activity of the Popular Party. Confirm the receipt of this letter.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Plan for a Communist united front in Iran**

At the same time, the Comintern worked out a plan for assistance to Communist activity not only in Iran, to the Tudeh Party as a “united, anti-fascist front,” but also to other Communists in the neighboring lands. For the execution of this plan (which is incomplete in the Comintern archives),<sup>71</sup> a group of cadres were designated by the ECCI to go to Iran; their tasks were:

- “1 – Organization of lines of contact with the Communist parties of:
- a. Arab countries (Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq);
  - b. India, according to one or two variants as follows:
    - i) through Basra or Iraqi territory; ii) through the Iranian ports of the Persian Gulf; iii) through Afghanistan; iv) through British Baluchistan [now Pakistan].
  - c. Organization of direct relations with Iran (establishment of their own radio transmitter) ;
  - d. Organizational and technical assistance to Iranian Communists for the creation of mass organizations and then in the re-establishment of the Iranian Communist Party.”<sup>72</sup>

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70. Letter by G.M. Dimitrov, dated 15 December 1941, to Artashes, Avanesian, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

71. The Comintern document being incomplete, it is certain that its more political details were removed from the files, before the opening of the archives in the early 1990s.

72. Further parts of this report were not in the Comintern archives.

The plan further stated that: “In order to put into effect the tasks presented to the group, its members will receive special schooling according to the division of responsibilities between them.” The group was composed of four individuals: 1) K., 2) A., 3) Sh., and 4) R. From among these, only two could be identified from the documents available in the Comintern files: number 2 (A.), that is, Fath-Allah Adelov<sup>73</sup> and number 3 (Sh.), i.e., Zolaykha Sharif (Asadi).<sup>74</sup> While the detailed description of the tasks of numbers 1, 2, and 4 were not to be found in the open Comintern archives, Z. Sharif Asadi’s were briefly mentioned: An Iranian national, she was to go first to Iran. In possession of Iranian passport, she was to leave towards the end of 1941 through the Turkmeno-Iranian frontier, with the “legend” that she had completed her medical studies in the Soviet Union, with two years of practical training in hospitals and now was returning to her country. In Tehran she would open a “private hospital” [clinic]. This enterprise would be financed partly by the funds she would take with her and partly by what her father would provide her with in Tehran. It was added: “In reality, we must give her the fund for the organization of the hospital.”

### The anti-fascist program

The study of the said program and its related instructions would help understand the Soviet united front tactics during the anti-fascist war. On 8 November 1941 Col. Seliukov, Chief of the Second Section of the Third Department of Intelligence of the Red Army, enclosed S. M. Eskandari’s anti-fascist party program to the records of conversations he had held with the latter and sent them to his superiors and the Comintern. The program is as follows:

#### *“Introduction:*

At a time when national independence around the world finds itself threatened by the dictatorial regime and despotism, and when the liberty of individual[s],

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73. Born in 1902 in the Iranian district of Samarkand, Adelov was an experienced Communist cadre. He had been trained at the KUTV and Workers’ Faculty (*Rabfak*), knowing Persian, Uzbek, Tajik, Azeri Turkish, and Russian. He had been a worker, an employee, a teacher, and an educational director in Samarkand, as well as an *agitprop* director, and a party official in Tajikistan. He had never been sanctioned by the All-Russian CP; he had been awarded by the Tajik SSR for his work; he was described by Guliaev as having “valuable qualities”: modest, contemplative, prudent, and a good observer of underground rules. He could perform his duties in Iran after undergoing “special training.” Guliaev report, dated 2 December 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

74. Born in 1916 in Tehran, she was the daughter of veteran Social Democrat and Communist Asadi and CC member, who had been excluded from the ICP in 1930, but who had remained “pro-Soviet,” nevertheless. She had pursued medical studies in the USSR, become a physician, and had been member of the Komsomol between 1933 and 1937. She had been excluded from that organization in 1937 because she had been allowed to join it in 1933 in violation of organizational rules. She had worked for Soviet medical institutions for two years. She was described by Guliaev as “too trustful of people,” for which reason she had to undergo “special schooling” before being sent to her assignment in Iran as a “transmission link.” She knew Persian, Russian, and some German. See Guliaev report on her and her father, dated 2 December 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

won in the course of centuries at the cost of bloody revolutionary struggle, is being destroyed by dictators and enslavers, when international reaction stamps out and destroys all national liberties, the Iranian people, who were, for the last twenty years, in the clutches of despotism and tyranny, having had to bear the greatest evil and misfortunes, have once more tasted the happiness of freedom.

In order to acquire true freedom and the full destruction of the remnants of the past tyranny and violence, on the one hand, and to deny reaction and despotism the possibility of taking advantage of the situation so as to enslave once more the Iranian people for its own criminal interests, an Iranian group is organized in Tehran. It represents all free Iranians and the working class. It calls upon all the freedom-loving, democratic, and enslaved Iranians to unite around it [the group] so as to obtain the satisfaction of their just demands, to establish a democratic regime, and to declare the downfall of reaction and despotism.

*The main objective of the group:*

- 1) Preserving the independence and integrity of Iran.
- 2) Establishing a democratic regime and granting of all personal and social rights to man, such as the freedom of expression (oral and written), of opinion, and of assembly.
- 3) Combating all kinds of dictatorial and despotic regimes.
- 4) [Carrying out] the necessary reforms with the objective of making use of land. Organization of [a] normal way of life for peasants and workers in Iran.
- 5) Reforming education and health preservation as well as introducing generalized, compulsory, and free education; providing the popular masses with the benefits of culture and health preservation.
- 6) Establishing just taxation, taking into consideration the interests of popular masses.
- 7) Reforming the economy and trade, developing the industry, the mines of useful subterranean products, as well as the transport system, such as building and the preservation of a vast network of roads and the improvement of the railroads.
- 8) Confiscating, in favor of the Iranian people, the properties of the former shah and his supporters who acquired them through criminal and tyrannical abuse of their power.<sup>75</sup>

All the preceding is confirmed by the founders of the party group and will be in force until the party conference is organized. In order to put into effect the above, and taking into consideration the present situation in Iran, the party group sets itself the following tasks:

- 1) To organize new elections for the Majles; to ensure the election of true representatives of the people and the freedom of elections; and to eliminate all kinds of intrigues.
- 2) To put an end to the arbitrariness of those in power and to destroy the police state.
- 3) To raise the standard of living of the popular masses and to modify employment laws so that salaries ensure the vital minimum for civil servants.
- 4) To struggle in a determined manner against pilferage of state property, bribery, and all kinds of illegal use of position in [government] service.

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75. The content of this program, not the exact wording, is provided by Khomeh'i (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 23); he does not indicate his source. A similar version of the "fundamental principles" of the Tudeh and its first "program" is given by the Ziba'i SAVAK's handbook (1964: 199 ff.).

- 5) To compensate morally and materially those who under the former shah were subjected to persecution and tyranny. To demand the re-transfer of lands belonging to petty landowners and peasants from whom they had been taken by force.
- 6) To prosecute according to law and punish the people who harmed the country and freedom, as well as those who oppressed and suppressed the personal and social rights of man.
- 7) To provide social security for the people and to facilitate their moral and material life. Special attention must be paid to the creation of larger quantities and cheaper prices of food products. The most intense struggle must be waged against speculation and price increases.
- 8) To ensure the independence of judges and the real separation of the executive and judicial branches of the state.
- 9) To abolish all loans and forced orders that existed under the former shah and were meant to harm the popular masses.
- 10) To change the laws and regulations of military service in the interest of popular masses and to stop the application of violence and disorder in this domain.”<sup>76</sup>

### **New encounters between Soviet officials and S. M. Eskandari**

In a second meeting<sup>77</sup> between S. M. Eskandari and the Soviet official A. A. Kuznetsov in late February 1942,<sup>78</sup> the former informed the latter of the imminent arrival of Seyyed Zia Tabataba’i, the notorious pro-British politician who had jointly carried out the 1921 coup with Colonel Reza Khan,<sup>79</sup> and who had been exiled by the latter on account of personal rivalry. Along with a number of other right-wing politicians supporting the “firm-hand policy,” such as M. Tadayyon and General Ahmadi, Seyyed Zia was a candidate for premiership. Further, discussing the growing audacity of the pro-Nazi group distributing handbills of “Long Live Iran and Germany,” Eskandari lamented that in the “absence of a mass party” the reactionaries “will easily reestablish the military dictatorship.”

As regards the progress of the Tudeh, he added that cells had been organized in Arak, Isfahan, Rasht, Tabriz, Kashan, and some other localities.<sup>80</sup> In Tabriz cell members had gone up to 2,500. With regard to the question, put to him by his

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76. Sent by Col. Seliukov, on 8 November 1941, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

77. The report of the first meeting with Kuznetsov was not in the Comintern files.

78. The date of the meeting is not mentioned on the document; on the other hand, it is remarked that one copy of the report of conversation was printed on 21 February 1942.

79. For an extensive history of this pro-British coup d’état, see C. Chaqueri (1995: chap. 14).

80. According to a British report, by the time the first “provincial conference” of the party was held on 9 October 1942, the Tudeh had at least provincial committees in Arak, Rasht, Qazvin, and in Azerbaijan. See “Extracts from the Review of the Foreign Press,” 182 (16 April 1943), FO, 371/35061.



representative Sartipzadeh, of the attachment of Azerbaijan,<sup>81</sup> from the linguistic viewpoint, to the USSR or Turkey, Eskandari said that he had replied that “now was not the time to raise this question. It was necessary to uphold the integrity of Iran, because the language was not the most important point; it is required to improve the conditions of the people’s living standard and to hold the party in readiness in case of necessity to prevent an attempt to restore the military dictatorship.”<sup>82</sup>

S. M. Eskandari went on to state that his “second task was the establishment of a newspaper which he considered essential to publish as the organ of the Popular [Tudeh] Party, adding that he [had] decided to act openly and decisively, otherwise we would be lost as a party.” Having received a verbal authorization for the publication of the newspaper, Eskandari thought that even if he managed to publish it, he feared, “it would be rapidly closed down as in the second issue he would [certainly] publish the program of the Popular Party.”

Come what may, he was determined to act firmly: “We must make ourselves known, otherwise we will be strangled one by one.” Then he proceeded to tell his Soviet interlocutor that “I am awaiting your advice and help. Statements alone of non-intervention in [Iran’s] internal affairs can have regrettable consequences, as happened twenty years ago,”<sup>83</sup> that is when the dictatorship of Reza Khan was installed with British support.

### **Degradation of the economic situation in 1942 and the Tudeh success**

In a report by the Soviet Naval Intelligence Directorate,<sup>84</sup> Captain Vorontsov provided very interesting accounts of the situation in Iran during the year 1942: the severe deterioration of economic conditions in Iran; population of entire provinces starving; people dying in the streets in consequence of the scarcity of bread; cities filled with beggars arriving from starved villages; 3,000 people in Rasht took part in pilferage of rice stores; people were killed and injured; fascist propaganda arousing anti-Soviet and anti-British feelings in the people; the situation in Iran “produced different [political] currents in the government circles and among certain influential people.” One of the “small groups principally working for their own interests and endeavoring to reinforce their influence on the government

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81. Sartipzadeh had put the question to Eskandari because of his differences with pro-Baqerov elements in Tabriz who wanted to enter the Tudeh organization, raising the question of “autonomy,” the Azeri language, etc., a line that Sartipzadeh strongly opposed. The embryo of the Autonomous Government of Azerbaijan formed in 1945, this issue, which calls for a separate analysis, is discussed in two letters in Persian by Asadi to Rosta. RTsKhIDNI, 495/90/218.

82. “Transcription of conversation,” between S. M. Eskandari and A. A. Kuznetsov, 21 February 1942, sent by Lt.-Col. Kalashnikov, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/192.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Main Naval Staff of the Marine Fleet, dated 25 September 1942, Moscow, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/195.

through gaining the support of the people by demagogic manifestations” was the Tudeh Party which acted legally. “The leaders of this party have a secret (“conspiratorial” in Russian) center.” The party published the newspapers *Surat* in Rasht, *Siasat* and *Mardom* in Tehran; and “the main objective” of the party was “to improve the situation of the workers of Iran.”

### **Tudeh’s first self-image**

A report that seems to be an account of Tudeh’s founding and a first annual summary of its activities, sent to the Comintern most probably by Artashes Avanesian, the contact man with the ECCI, notes that the party was organized at the end of 1941, its “initiators” having been Communists released from prison on the basis of the amnesty granted on the occasion of the accession to the throne of the new shah. Unaware of the secret six-week long discussions between Solayman Mirza and Col. Seliukov, the report further states:

“After [their] release from Tehran prisons, there formed a group by Communists and intellectuals sympathizing with them, who had been condemned to prison terms along with the Communists, i.e., Abol-Qasem Asadi, Iraj Eskandari, Dr [Morteza] Yazdi, and Reza Rousta. It was decided to create an illegal provisional bureau of the Communist Party, composed of Reza Rousta, Iraj Eskandari, Dr Yazdi, Dr [Reza] Radmanesh, and Dr [Mohammed] Bahrami, all of them [except Rousta] were members of the famous group of the ‘Fifty-three.’ The bureau decided to establish links with the ECCI. It appointed Artashes Avanesian, who still was in [internal] exile, for this purpose.”<sup>85</sup>

The bureau undertook the struggle for the liberation of all Communists, particularly of those condemned in connection with the case of the “Fifty-three.” With this task in view, all means were used, including pressure on ministers and parliamentary deputies. Three to four illegal cells were created in Tehran, composed of some twenty men. It was decided to develop all activities on the basis of organizational principles of the Communist Party.

Unaware of Seliukov-Eskandari secret talks, the author of the annual report notes that the creation of the Tudeh as an “anti-fascist party” was the idea of the Communist group, which negotiated it successfully with Solayman Mirza, and that a special commission composed of Communists and democrats “elaborated the party program.” Subsequently, an organizational assembly of the party was planned, which chose a “provisional Central Committee”<sup>86</sup> of fifteen members. Of

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85. “Popular Party and the work of Iranian Communists,” incomplete text, undated, but no doubt written in late December 1942. See RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/195.

86. Khameh’i (*Forsat...*, *op. cit.*: 28-29) provides a different version of these developments and attributes the founding of the Communist group within the Tudeh to A. Avanesian. He also states that, after the death of S. M. Eskandari, R. Rousta – not A. Avanesian – became the “official contact” with the Soviets, not the Comintern, which is informally the same thing – a claim which does not tally with Dimitrov’s report at the time.

the list of the fifteen CC members the author provides,<sup>87</sup> except for the first four, the rest had been members of either the ICP or the “Fifty-three.”

The report also remarks that when the police threatened Tudeh CC members with banishment from Tehran, the intellectuals among them “were somewhat afraid.” Thus the CC “attempted to obtain the support of the Soviet embassy, with which it entered into contact through Bloshapkin, previously known to Reza Rousta.” At the same time, the CC sought to win the support of popular masses. The majority of CC members were sent to the provinces, and their trips were “crowned with success.” Organizations of the Tudeh Party were started “everywhere.” Yet the report adds that the party was “not yet numerically large.” Towards September 1942, “it counted only 2,087 registered members, of whom 1,137 were in Tehran and 950 in the provinces.<sup>88</sup> With over 50 % working class membership, this “only mass party” in the country “obliged the government to take it into consideration.”<sup>89</sup> This incomplete (mutilated) report ends with the comment that the “weak aspect” of the Tudeh was the non-involvement of the peasantry in the party work.

Another report sent, ostensibly on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, from Tehran on 7 November 1942, by A. Avanesian, informs the Comintern of the composition of the Tudeh CC, with which the author does not seem to have agreed, as “I did not take part in selecting the existing CC members because I was in prison at Bandar Abbas.” Avanesian recommends to the Comintern to study the separate report he had made to the Communist International on the “characteristics” of the Tudeh CC members – a report that was not to be found in the archives. He also tells the Comintern that upon his release and arrival in Tehran “I said that this CC is not wholly suited and is not able to lead the mass movement. [...] I also pointed out that the program of the Tudeh Party is incomplete and promises nothing concrete to the workers and peasants.”<sup>90</sup>

Along with the second report on Tudeh’s first year of existence, the Comintern archives contain a message greetings from Artashes Avanesian to Stalin and the Soviet CC, dated 7 November 1942, the 25th anniversary of the October revolution. Sent to the “Great Leader and Friend,” the message conveys the sentiments of the Communist group within the Tudeh. It indicates that for its author and his companions “in struggle there is no greater honor than the leadership of the bold battle of the Soviet people against the black armies of reaction and imperialism.” Certain that victory will be Stalin’s in this “sacred war,” Avanesian stated that “workers of the whole world contemplate with admiration the heroic battle of the

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87. S. M. Eskandari, ‘Abbas Mirza Eskandari, ‘Ali-Asghar Sartipzadeh, A.-H. Noushin, A.-H. Shafi’i, Mousavi, B. Alavi, Mir Javad Javadzadeh Pishavari, A.-Q. Asadi, Reza Rousta, M. Bahrami, I. Eskandari, R. Radmanesh, and M. Yazdi; *Khamch’i (Forsat... , op. cit.: 22)* also provides a different list of the Central Committee.

88. This does not tally with the number given by S. M. Eskandari of over 2,000 in Tabriz alone.

89. “Popular Party and the work of Iranian Communists,” RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/195.

90. Report by A. Avanesian to the executive of the Comintern, dated 7 November 1942, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/195; this report was accompanied by a message sent to Dimitrov on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the October revolution.

people of the USSR, the glorious defense of steel fortresses [note the pun with the meaning of Stalin in Russian!<sup>91</sup>] of Leningrad, Moscow, Sebastopol, and especially Leningrad, realizing that the Soviet people are indebted to your [Stalin's] wise leadership for these victories." Preserving "the great legacy of Lenin against the attempts of filthy fascist bands," Stalin was "leading the Soviet Union to victory in this war, the most horrible in the history of mankind."

Idolization of Stalin went even further for the Tudeh leader:

"To you befall the greatest honor, to guide the struggle of the proletariat at the period of underground [work], at the time of the revolution, and finally the construction of the first socialist state. Today, after twenty-five years of work and victories on the socialist front, we send you, the great leader and friend, [our] warm, revolutionary greetings."

In conclusion, Avanesian expresses the hope that "for many long years, you will, together with the steel party of Lenin, [continue to] lead the immense armies of workers in the battle for the final liberation of humanity from the yoke of capital. Long live the All-Russian Communist Party! Long live the heroic Red Army! Long live the peoples of the USSR."<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

The evidence we have examined above clearly demonstrates that the Tudeh was a creation of the Soviet state, through the agency of its Red Army, thus demolishing the thesis that this organization was a genuine party established independently by the progressive elements who had been released from Reza Shah's jails on the morrow of Iran's occupation by the Allies. On the other hand, while there is some "congruence" between the "Aliev thesis" and what we have documented in this study, it is important to put an end to the myth disseminated by the SAVAK, which, precisely because it is a myth, would cut both ways, particularly when used by some Communist repentants whose repetition of the myth is denounced along with their repentance by the faithful. In the same breath it must be added, however, that the Tudeh, though established through the agency of the Soviet Army, reflected and yet masterfully used, a genuine desire by a number of political prisoners who had wished to lead a progressive political party that would play an important, if not decisive, role in the destiny of their country. The documentation we have perused above also demonstrates that the Soviets instrumentalized the Tudeh from the very outset for their own national interest. From the examination of the very first contact with S. M. Eskandari down to the detailed approval of its program by not only the

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91. It is widely known in Tudeh history that Avanesian's "nom de guerre" was "Poulad," i.e., Steel (Stalin).

92. Signed "Artashes [Avanesian] on behalf of Aktiv," dated 7 November 1942, RTsKhIDNI, 495/74/195. The group "Aktiv" is not known; it must have been the same as the "Communist kernel" within the Tudeh Party.

Comintern under Dimitrov, but also Stalin and his closest advisers, we can clearly see that Tudeh was to be guided by the Soviets in the direction that served their interest. The manner of founding of the Tudeh foretold its expansion, policies in Iran's national politics, and final destiny.

It is thus not surprising that, in spite of the country's great suffering under Reza Shah's dictatorship for nearly twenty years, the strength of the Tudeh remained very limited in its first year of existence (fall 1941 to fall 1942), as Hitler's army moved deep into Soviet territory, but began to increase after the Soviet victory over the Reichswehr at Stalingrad in January 1943.<sup>93</sup> No less interesting is the fact that the Soviets, in spite of a clear request put to them by the Communist playwright Noushin and others, refused to return to Iran, and later executed, some Iranian Communists who had survived the great purges and still lived in NKVD detention camps. Apparently, this was due to the fear the Soviets had that a group of "sectarian" Communists – as Dimitrov put it to Stalin – of the dissolved ICP would carry out policies that would isolate them in Iranian society during a crucial period. But the real reason must be sought elsewhere, i.e., in the two decades of independent line the ICP had attempted to carry out in spite of Soviet guidance. It is clear that, in view of their alliance with the Western powers in a life-and-death struggle against a ferocious enemy such as Hitler, the Soviets could hardly afford, at a decisive moment, to bring onto Iran's sensitive political field Communists who had been critical of past Soviet policies in Iran. Still less could they afford to turn loose and promote such Communist leaders for the post-war period, as long-term Soviet interests would be threatened by the presence of critical Communists who had, in addition, tasted the fruit of the really existing "Communist paradise."

The naiveté of those young Tudeh leaders who had been collaborators or students of Dr Taqi Arani<sup>94</sup> and had been arrested and jailed with him in 1937, on

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93. Although Semenov's figure of a Tudeh membership of 25,000 at its first congress in 1944 is exaggerated (N. N. Semionoff, *art. cit.*: 2), it nevertheless witnessed a rapid inflation of several fold within a year after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. The membership of the party seems to have grown very rapidly after the end of the war itself, for according to one delegate to the Tudeh first congress held in summer 1944, 80 % of its membership was made of "veteran workers of the cause and only 20 % of new recruits." British Embassy Report dated 26 August 1944, FO, 371/40187.

94. Arani (1902-1940) had been educated in Berlin, where he had been introduced to Marxism and had been acquainted with such German Communist leaders as Will Münzenberg, returned to Iran in 1929 and founded in 1934 the independent Marxist review *Donya*. He was contacted by a Comintern agent in 1935 and his secret intellectual circle was drawn into the "new ICP" that was being formed by the Comintern after the dissolution of the ICP. The new group was then "discovered" by the police upon the arrest of two other Comintern agents who confessed to the existence of a new Communist group with Arani at its head. Arani and the others were tried and condemned to various terms of prison. Only Arani died in prison, reportedly under terrible conditions imposed upon him. For a study of Arani's life and activities, see C. Chaqueri, ed. (1969-1994: "Introduction." vols 14 and 15); id., *The tragedy of Iranian dissident Communists, 1926-1938* (forthcoming). Assertions or suggestions according to which Arani was the "founder" of the Tudeh Party are obviously false, since Arani died in prison on 3 February 1940 and the Tudeh was founded in December 1941, nearly two years later; see, for instance, J. Droz, ed., *Histoire générale du socialisme*, 3: *De 1919 à 1945* (Paris: PUF, 1977): 635-638 which implies that Arani founded the Tudeh.

the one hand, and their ignorance of ICP history and the Soviet experience partially due to the prevalence of political repression in Iran, on the other, prevented them from seeing the light of reality and the trap they were falling into in the hope of realizing their ideal of saving Iran from the morass of colonial capitalism and indigenous dictatorship. It is for this reason that when the Tudeh leaders faced their challenge during the Soviet demand for an oil concession in Iran (the Kaftrazde mission of fall 1944),<sup>95</sup> they bungled up completely and seriously risked their increasing popularity, particularly because on that issue they opposed the patriotic-democratic leader Mohammed Mosaddeq, not the Iranian reaction. On the occasion of the founding of the Azerbaijan and Kurdish autonomous governments (1945-1946), too, they made grave mistakes and were identified in the eyes of the public at large with Soviet expansionism in Iran.<sup>96</sup> Their anti-democratic treatment of their dissidents, leading to the 1948 split, did not improve their public image either.<sup>97</sup> Although officially proscribed in February 1949 under the pretext of participating in a so-called attempt on the life of the shah,<sup>98</sup> the Tudeh remained strong until the advent of the oil nationalization movement. The biggest challenge the Tudeh faced was when it opposed Iran's national-democratic movement under Mosaddeq for the nationalization of Iranian petroleum industry, which had been in the hands of the British since the beginning of the century. The Tudeh's ferocious opposition to Mosaddeq and labeling him as an "American stooge" – no doubt a line recommended by its Soviet mentor – cost the party an enormous price, identifying it increasingly with Soviet interests in Iran. The Tudeh has since been blamed by most Iranians, including a good number of former Tudeh intellectuals, of having largely contributed to the success of the Anglo-American coup d'état in 1953.<sup>99</sup> Contrary to what has been generally claimed, the Tudeh, its military organization included, was not vanquished by the CIA-supported Military Government issued from the 1953 coup d'état, but by the doctrinal and programmatic crisis its leading cadres and members went through during the party's opposition to Mosaddeq, depriving them of the necessary confidence in a leadership that partly lived lethargically in Moscow exile and partly in underground at home.<sup>100</sup> The SAVAK only swept the

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95. For an account of this Soviet demand, see the debate in the 14th Majles (1944-1946), including Dr M. Mosaddeq's intervention, in H. Kay Ostovan, ed., *Siasat-e movazeneh-ye manfi*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1948), I: 156-234.

96. On this issue, see L. L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War, The Azerbaijan crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, 1992); see also its review by this author: *MESA Bulletin*, 1 (July 1993).

97. On the 1948 split, see J. Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khianat-e roshanfekran* (Tehran, 1997) : 420 ff.

98. The Pahlavi regime's claim that in 1949 there was an "attempt" on the life of the shah – after which the Tudeh was banned, repression was reinforced, and the Constitution was appended under anti-democratic conditions to increase the autocratic power of the shah – has never been questioned. In a detailed study of this issue I have, on the bases of irrefutable archival documents, demonstrated that the "attempt" was fake and stage-managed by the royal court in order to re-establish Reza Shah's autocracy. See C. Chaqueri, *The Shah's first coup d'état, 1949* (forthcoming).

99. See B. Amirhosrowi (1996).

100. See C. Chaqueri, ed. (1978-1981).

broken pieces of an organization already shattered from the inside by Mosaddeq's patriotic and democratic challenge. The revival of the party leadership in 1957 under Khrushchev and the self-criticism made at the Fourth party plenum<sup>101</sup> in the same year did not improve the image of the party at home and among its former cadres, nor the new split in 1964 provoked even by its pro-Chinese wing. The Tudeh's role in the struggle against the guerrilla groups at home in the 1970s; the party's timid approval of the royal reforms in the same decade under the new General-Secretary Iraj Eskandari, while the Soviet relations with Tehran were steadily improving; the sudden removal of Eskandari and the appointment of N. Kianouri, in January 1979, on the eve of the revolution;<sup>102</sup> support for Khomeini's line under Kianouri;<sup>103</sup> and the unconditional support the party leadership always gave to the Soviet state and party, all appeared to be, not without reason, a reflection of Tudeh's total subservience to Soviet interests in Iran.

Paradoxically, the life of the Tudeh Party came to an end when the remnants of elements who still hanged on to democratic ideals were forced to split from it after the death of Iraj Eskandari on the eve of May Day 1985, not with the demise of the Soviet state.

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