



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Iranians general strike for democracy and land reform, 1907

May

1907

to: July

1907

Country: Iran

Location City/State/Province: Tabriz

Goals:

Initially: "We want a constitution that would determine the limits of a constitutional monarchy and the rights of people. Otherwise, the Shari'a of Muhammad is protected and in place and everyone knows their religious duties. We loudly proclaim that unless you sign and give to the nation the constitution which was written by the learned representatives and others and has been completed, we will lose patience, and we will say what should not be said," a telegram to the parliamentary Majlis read.

Formally: A proposed 6-part Bill of Rights encapsulated their demands. Namely, the right to strike, freedom of press and organization, a workday of no more than 8 hours, extensive land reform, and equality of citizens regardless of religious affiliation.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 117. General strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 117. General strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 074. Rent withholding
- 117. General strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 074. Rent withholding
- 117. General strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 074. Rent withholding

Methods in 6th segment:

- 074. Rent withholding

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Peasants
- craftsman
- intellectuals
- low-level clerics
- merchants
- workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

The Tabriz Anjuman and the Anjumans of the Mujahidin of Tabriz, two grassroots democracy groups working out of the city of Tabriz; Sayyid Hasan Taqizadeh; Ashan al-Dawla.

Partners:

Rural villagers and peasants throughout the province of Azarbaijan

External allies:

Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP)

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Not Known

Segment Length: *Approximately 2 weeks*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Majlis parliament; the royal court; Minister of Justice Abdul Husayn Mirza Farmanfarma; conservative leaders Shaikh Fazlullah Nuri and Muhammad 'Ali Smith

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known- After the campaign one member of the Fada'is, or devotees, within the Anjumans of the Mujahidin shot and killed conservative chief minister Amin al-Sultan.

Repressive Violence:

Not Known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Land policy was reformed, but the other demands were not recognized. However, the land reform did not prove to be that beneficial to the peasants. The campaign had a strong presence in the country and the leadership became permanent bodies of government.

The infrastructure was never weakened

Support grew quickly in the lower economic classes and the two leading collaborative groups came together as a strong force. Anjumans sprang up across the country and asserted their power.

After a year of striking and sit-ins outside the British Embassy, Iranian citizens were granted a constitution and parliamentary body called the Majlis on August 5, 1906. Democracy was already being expressed on the streets in the form of grassroots anjumans, or councils. Before the Constitutional Revolution in August, these anjumans were secret assemblies of unsatisfied politicians and educated Muslim scholars called ulamas. But following the revolution, the anjumans became open, mass organizations of the kind of democracy Iranians wished to see. A wide variety of people participated in the anjuman: intellectuals, craftsmen, merchants, workers, low-level clerics. The Majlis saw a way to try and utilize and control the anjumans by sanctioning the councils to supervise elections. However, the anjumans survived past the elections and became local grassroots political bodies. Crown Prince Muhammad 'Ali Mirza did not approve.

The anjuman in the city of Tabriz emerged as the most influential in the country. The Tabriz Anjuman immediately confronted the ruling political institution, gave themselves political recognition, created the first independent newspaper in Iran, reduced the

prices of some goods while fixing others, and instated a secular education program. They drew inspiration from the Russian Caucasus unfolding nearby. Social democratic societies known as Anjumans of the Mujahidin (“warriors of the jihad or holy war”) dispersed from Baku all around Iran. The Mujahidin were former coal miners who had been radicalized by the 1905 Russian revolution and kept in communication with the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP). The Mujahidin of Tabriz, too, became a strong force and began to work in collaboration with the Tabriz Anjuman to challenge the ruling powers of Iran.

One issue that the Majli’s did not address was land reform. Under the tuyul land allotment system, five taxes were collected from the peasants working the land. That money was then distributed to the village head, the overseer, minor authorities, and the standing governor. In addition, the overseer held virtually unlimited power. He was able to determine and change taxes, fine and punish peasants, and women were often forced to comply with the sexual demands of landowners. Ahsan al-Dawla, the agriculture worker’s representative from Tabriz, remarked that with a constitutional government “it would be impossible for the peasants to remain enslaved by the laws of tuyul.” As dissatisfaction mounted, the Tabriz Anjuman and a left-wing delegate from Azarbaijan, Sayyid Hasan Taqizadeh, started to conceptualize supplements to the constitution, beginning with a bill of rights. Included in the bill of rights would be freedom of press and organization, freedom of religion, an 8-hour workday, and a detailed land reform. In response to the proposition, conservative oppositional leaders Shaikh Fazlullah Nuri and Muhammad ‘Ali Shah brought forth their own idea. They wanted a Council of Ulama with veto power over the Majlis in consideration of the Shari’a.

This proposal outraged the Tabriz Anjuman and the Mujahidin of Tabriz. Letters and newspaper articles attacked the conservative opposition leaders and speculated as to why the Majlis were not taking a more aggressive stand. Meanwhile, a general strike in Tabriz persisted throughout May and June as the tension grew. People began to strike throughout the province of Azarbaijan, and then rural villagers joined in the strike, too. In the remote areas, peasants were able to expel landlords and overseers through their rent strikes. This pressure applied by the Iranian people had a few different consequences on the government. On the one hand, the Majlis caved to the conservative leaders and approved Article 2 to the constitution, the Council of Ulama. On the other hand the tuyul land assignment was abolished. Revenues from peasants were distributed into the Treasury of Tehran and the overseers were dispersed from control. Even with these gains, the Tabriz Anjuman and the Mujahidin of Tabriz continued to push for reform.

Dynamics of the reform groups shifted around late August 1907 when the Anglo-Russian agreement was signed and Iran was divided into two spheres of influence. In frustration a member of the ‘Abbas Aqa of Mujahidin, a small group of Fada’is (devotees) willing to sacrifice themselves for reform, assassinated Amin al-Sultan as he was leaving parliament. The assassination ignited liberal support but dried up any conservative support the Tabriz Anjuman and the Mujahidin of Tabriz had gained.

Research Notes

Influences:

Striking and sit-ins outside of the British Embassy in Iran for over a year before the constitution was established (1); Russian Caucasus (1).

Sources:

Afary, Janet. “Peasant Rebellions of the Caspian Region during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1909.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23.2 (May 1991): 137-161.

Foran, John. “A Century of Revolution: Comparative, Historical, and Theoretical Perspectives on Social Movements in Iran.” *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran*. Ed. John Foran. Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1994. 223-239.

Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (19/05/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Alexa Ross 26/9/2010

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#) .

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> .

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/17/2017 - 17:33): <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/iranians-general-strike-democracy-and-land-reform-1907>

Links:

[1] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>