Rachel Melis
Anarchism in Iran
2009

Retrieved on 22nd November 2021 from
onlinelibrary.wiley.com
Published in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest.*

theanarchistlibrary.org

Anarchism in Iran

Rachel Melis

2009

Historians have noted the presence of at least a few self-identified anarchists in colonial-era Iran, from the Armenian revolutionary Alexander Atabekian (1868–ca. 1940?), who began publishing his journal *Hamayankh* (*Commune*) from Rasht, to a protest staged by unnamed "Iranian anarchists" in Rasht against the 1909 execution of Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (Bonakdaria 2005: 337; Selbuz 2006). Nonetheless, anarchist movements in Iran are difficult to chronicle for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that a wide spectrum of political movements has come to define Iranian revolutionary practices. These movements illustrated a broad range of political and religious ideologies marked by a mix of nationalist, socialist, communist, and secularist tendencies, though they shared the common goal of resisting a repressive regime. Many events ranging from the Tobacco Protest of 1891, the Constitutional Revolution (1906–9), and the secular oil nationalization movement (1951–3) to the Revolution of 1978–9 could be considered to have an anti-authoritarian character, though it is unclear whether those who participated in these events would have self-identified with anarchist ideology.

Iranian guerilla movements, particularly the various incarnations of the Jangali movement of 1915–30, having grown out of the Constitutional Revolution, were the first to have advocated violence in their tactics. The guerilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s, which included the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedaie Guerilla (OIPFG) or Fedayeen and the People's Mojahedin of Iran (MKO), espoused mixtures of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism to varying degrees. These groups were well armed and differed in their composition from previous guerilla movements in a number of ways. They were composed of mostly educated revolutionaries who were influenced by contemporary South American anarchist texts, particularly those emphasizing armed struggle as a means to effect change. They were also instrumental in bringing about change in the regime at the time, though splintering in the groups led to a weakening of organized strategies and a waning in subsequent public support. In their emphasis on guerilla tactics, both the Mojahedin and the Fedayeen have been alternately valorized and prosecuted for their emphasis on "propaganda by the deed" in resisting the Shah's regime in the 1940s and in their role during the Revolution of 1978–9.

Revolt in Iran during the last century is well documented, but it is more accurate to write of the left's activities in sporadic bursts. This is most notable in the working people's movements such as the "Shoras" (Farsi for workers' unions), formed in the 1970s, where workers self-organized and took control of the means of production and distribution. In rural areas, peasants would revolt and take over the lands, while residential neighborhoods self-patrolled and organized demonstrations in the streets. Strikes and sit-ins were frequent as well as student demonstrations. The poor organized a stand-off and resisted police in the summer of 1977 over squatting rights, while a strike by oil workers in 1978 effectively halted the nation's economy for over a month (Schmidt 2005).

After the revolution of 1979, many active leftists fled Iran in exile. As a result, the last few decades have witnessed some growth in small anarchist communities within the Iranian diaspora of Europe and North America. For a short time beginning in 2001, the magazine *Nakhdar* ("Neither God, Nor State, Nor Bosses") kept anarchocommunist principles alive for exiled Iranian radicals. Perhaps the most anarchistic tendency in Iranian active resistance is in the fact that revolution has been, and continues to be, a frequent and persistent aspect of Iranian history, whether it is peaceful or brought about through armed struggle.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Abrahamian, E. (1982) *Iran Between Two Revolutions.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Abrahamian, E. (2003) *The Crowd in the Persian Revolution.* In A. Hourani, P. S. Khoury, & M. C. Wilson (Eds.), *The Modern Middle East.* London: I. B. Tauris.

Bonakdaria, M. (2005) A World Born through the Chamber of a Revolver: Revolutionary Violence, Culture, and Modernity in Iran, 1906. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, 2: 318–40.

Cronin, S. (2004) *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left.* London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Foran, J. (Ed.) (1994) *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Piedar, P. (2005) Iranian Anarchism [Interview]. *Northeastern Anarchist* #10. Available at www.nefac.net (accessed March 12, 2008).

Schmidt, M. (2005) *Religious Fundamentalist Regimes: A Lesson from the Iranian Revolution 1978–1979.* Available at www.anarkismo.net (accessed March 15, 2008).

Selbuz, C. (2006) *Alexander Atabekian – An Anarchist on the Roads of Freedom.* Available online at www.anarkismo.net.