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THE PERSECUTION OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF IRAN 1844-1984

Douglas Martin

Bahá'í Studies

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Among the activities of the Association for Bahá'í Studies are seminars and lectures held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting, thus providing an opportunity for scholars to share insights and ideas on promising fields of research. **BAHA'Í STUDIES** is primarily a record of these papers and other scholarly work of a related nature. The Association also aims to develop courses, lectureships, and other formal presentations on the subject of the Bahá'í Faith at Canadian institutions of higher learning.

A cardinal principle of the Bahá'í Faith is the independent investigation of truth. While no member of the Bahá'í Faith would suggest that his views represent an authoritative interpretation of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, an attempt to relate the truths of Revelation to the fruits of a scrupulously scientific approach to phenomena in any given field of research lies at the very core of Bahá'í intellectual life.

The opinions and findings expressed are solely those of the authors of the papers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association.

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La recherche indépendante de la vérité étant un principe fondamental de la foi bahá'ie, aucun adepte de celle-ci ne se permettrait de suggérer que son point de vue puisse représenter une interprétation définitive des enseignements de Bahá'u'lláh; cependant, la tentative d'établir un rapport entre les vérités de la Révélation et les résultats d'une étude rigoureusement scientifique dans tout domaine de recherche donné exprime l'essence même de la vie intellectuelle bahá'ie.

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Preface

THE PERSECUTION OF the Bahá'ís of Iran by the Islamic regime is now widely recognized — and protested — by many people and their governments in the civilized world. What is less well known is that these attacks are only the most recent chapter in a series of pogroms which began with the founding of the Bahá'í Faith in the middle of the nineteenth century. A knowledge of Islam and an understanding of modern Iranian history are central to an understanding of why this phenomenon has repeatedly occurred in a country whose political, economic, and social structures have otherwise undergone considerable change.

Both from his training as a historian and on the basis of his current experience, the author of this study is well qualified to discuss the subject. In the pages that follow he successfully brings together the findings of historical scholarship and a thorough coverage of contemporary events, to explain why Iran has become the setting for a kind of religious persecution unparalleled in the modern world. Particular attention is given to the central role which the Shí'ih Muslim clergy have played in events at all stages.

The study will help the reader to understand one of the most puzzling features of the situation. Islam is a religion which explicitly preaches religious tolerance, and Islamic states generally accord a significant measure of protection to Jewish, Christian, and other minorities. Mr. Martin's analysis of the ideational and political roots of the problems reveals why Iran's largest religious minority has been excepted from this policy of toleration.

This unhappy chapter in world history is not over. The persecutions continue, and the position of the Bahá'ís in Iran becomes more perilous with each day. Commentators and students of current events will find Mr. Martin's work a valuable contribution to worldwide efforts to develop an intelligent and effective response.

The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, 1844 – 1984

Douglas Martin

ON FEBRUARY 1, 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned in triumph to Iran. Within days of his arrival, members of the Shi'ih Muslim clergy who had been particularly active in bringing him to power assumed authority in matters of civil and criminal law.¹ Some, including Sheikh Sádeq Khalkháli,² a former student of the Ayatollah, took the lead in conducting purges in which generals and officials of the fallen regime were machine-gunned on the roof of Khomeini's headquarters in Tehran after summary midnight trials. Not even high level French government efforts to save such individuals as former Prime Minister Hoveidá, were of any effect.³ Most outside observers tended to regard the killings as an excessive but understandable reaction to years of brutality by SAVAK, the Shah's secret police; anxiety about the real nature of Islamic justice began to develop only when the mullahs turned their attention to other segments of the population. Proceeding deliberately through the towns and villages of the Kurds, who had seen the revolution as the signal for their own liberation from oppression, Judge Blood, as

1. A helpful study of the revolution is Barry Rubin's, *Paved with Good Intentions*, pp. 190-336. See also John D. Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution*, pp. 165-324; and Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debauch: The American Failure in Iran*. For a sympathetic Muslim view, see Mohammed Heikal, *The Return of the Ayatollah*.

2. For descriptions of Sádeq Khalkháli, see Marc Kravetz, *Irano Nox*, chapters 3 and 11; and V.S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers*, chapter 3. Kravetz' book is a particularly valuable report on the Islamic regime.

3. Hoveidá, a sophisticated, Western-oriented politician, enjoyed the personal friendship of leading figures in the French government and intelligentsia, including then President Giscard d'Estaing and Jean-Paul Sartre. See also p. 13, n. 42.

This study is based on papers given at conferences of the Association for Bahá'í Studies and incorporates two articles subsequently published in *Middle East Focus* (a bi-monthly journal published by the Canadian Foundation for Peace in the Middle East, Toronto): "The Bahá'ís in Iran under the Pahlavi Regime," vol. 4, no. 6, March, 1982, and "The Bahá'ís in Iran under the Islamic Republic," vol. 6, no. 4, November, 1983.

Khalkháli soon became known, left a trail of suffering and death.⁴

In the city of Mahábád, the bloody assizes encountered a temporary setback. There, Kurdish leaders had taken the precaution of withdrawing to the hills, taking with them some 400 supporters of the revolutionary government as hostages. Rather than lose face by simply retreating from the city, Khalkháli undertook to try a few common law cases. In one instance, the defendant, terrified by the prospect of appearing before so awful a tribunal, had asked a neighbour, another merchant, to testify as a witness to the accused's integrity. Abdu'l Rahmán Qásemli, Secretary General of the Kurdish political movement, later described to the French journalist, Marc Kravetz (*Nouvel Observateur, Liberation*), what followed:⁵

Khalkháli was visibly bored by the case when suddenly he discovered, while examining the witness, a detail which could change the whole thing.

"So you are a Bahá'í!"

"Yes," replied the merchant [i.e., the witness].

"Then, you must convert immediately to the true faith of Islam; otherwise you will have to pay the court the sum of 500,000 túmáns [approximately \$80,000]."

"No," replied the merchant.

"What do you mean, no?"

"I cannot pay this sum. Even if I sold my shop

4. Rubin estimates that 300 persons had been killed by June 19, 1979 (Rubin, 1981, p. 370). Sádeq Khalkháli claimed credit for the majority of these executions (Kravetz, p. 69).

5. Kravetz, pp. 242-43.

and my home, I could not possibly realize 500,000 túmáns."

"In that case you will simply deny your ungodly beliefs, and you will be discharged."

"No," replied the merchant.

"You will not say no this time. Your life depends on it. Think the matter over carefully."

"I do not have the money you want from me and if I recanted, I would be a liar before God. You surely cannot force me to do this."

"There is no God but God and Muhammad is His Prophet. Make up your mind. Quickly." "No," the merchant obstinately replied, "I cannot deny my faith."

"May God forgive you. I sentence you to death."

The witness was taken out and shot.

Since the execution of Bahar Vujdáni, Chairman of the Bahá'í Assembly of Mahábád, described above, 170 other elected or appointed officials of the Bahá'í community of Iran have met similar fates.⁶ Independent testimony indicates that tens of thousands of other Iranian Bahá'ís have lost homes, jobs, pensions, savings, and businesses, have seen their shrines and cemeteries desecrated and their children expelled from school. The entire Bahá'í community of over 300,000 persons, the largest religious minority in Iran, live as outcasts in their own country, not knowing from moment to moment when revolutionary guards will burst into their houses, when news of the execution of another friend or relative will be announced on television and radio, or when some new regulation will be devised in the unremitting campaign to force them to recant their faith.⁷

6. The great majority of the persons executed have been members of the elected local and national governing bodies of the Bahá'í community, the Spiritual Assemblies. The other victims were principally persons who held high rank in teaching institutions of the faith or who were otherwise prominent in its service.

7. The Bahá'í International Community continues to supply the United Nations Human Rights Commission with a growing mass of documentation showing that not only death sentences, but also a wide range of economic persecutions are used to pressure Bahá'ís to renounce their religion: *The Bahá'ís in Iran, A Report on the Persecution of a Religious Minority*. (See illustrations facing and following pages.)

Initially, outside observers assumed that these outrages were an aspect of the political upheaval. It has since been generally recognized that political developments in Iran have little relevance to the subject. Independent forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the national legislatures of several states, the European Parliament, and Amnesty International, as well as some of the most internationally respected journalists have repeatedly charged that the attacks on the Iranian Bahá'ís represent a systematic campaign of religious persecution.⁸ Indeed, the efforts which the Iranian authorities are making to conceal the condition of the Bahá'í community, in contrast to their handling of political questions, serves to distinguish further the Bahá'í issue from other contemporary developments in that country.⁹

Nevertheless, the impression persists that the persecution is a recent phenomenon. In part, this impression arises from the sheer violence of the current wave of attacks and the relative ignorance of Western observers regarding the events taking place in Iran behind the façade of an Islamic Revolution. In large part, however, the idea that attacks on the Iranian Bahá'ís are an aspect of the revolutionary upheaval has been encouraged by the Islamic regime's effort to identify the Bahá'í community with the ruling order under the Pahlavi shahs. The argument is that the Bahá'ís were in some way political allies of the Pahlavis, or, at the very least, a kind of favoured élite who benefited from the former regime at the expense of their hapless Muslim fellow citizens.¹⁰ We are told that, even if it is granted that Bahá'ís are currently the victims of severe attacks, this is

8. The texts of the resolutions passed by the organizations mentioned, together with a representative selection of some of the articles referred to, are contained in *Bahá'ís in Iran* and its several updates.

9. An illustration of the regime's efforts to conceal its treatment of the Bahá'í community can be appreciated in a series of statements made by the Ayatollah Ardibílí, president of Iran's Revolutionary Supreme Court, on the subject of the killings of fifteen prominent Bahá'ís in December 1981, and January 1982. See p. 26, n. 79.

10. See, for example, a public statement issued by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Washington, D.C., October 17, 1979.

صفحه ۱۸
دوشنبه ۱۳ اردیبهشت ۱۳۶۱
۹ رجب ۱۴۰۲ - شماره ۱۱۵۷۷

کیمیا

بحکم دادگاه انقلاب اسلامی

۱۰ منافع و یکی از سران فرقه ضاله بهائیت در مشهد به دار آویخته شدند

منهد - خبرنگار کیمیا - دادسرای انقلاب اسلامی مشهد اعلام کرد ۱۰ تروریت بیگانه در اولین خفتی همراه خانواده آنها و سرخوشین در مشهد بنار آویخته شدند. اسامی و جرائم این افراد که عاملین ترور محمدرضا موسی، علی اربابیان، محمد حسن سلطان پوریشان، عیسی، محمود بولایی، حسینی، تقی شروزی، محمد صادق کریم، محمدرستمی و A پاسدار دودها جرح دیگر هستند از سوی دادسرای انقلاب اسلامی مشهد باین شرح منتشر شد:

۱- حسن تقی پوریشان، فرزند محمد صادق جیرجی، هواداری سرسخت از منافقین و عملیات ترور و فعالیت مستمر و بیگانه در جهت سازمان منافقین که با تمام تلاش و نیرو در جهت آنان فعالیت میکرده و سعی و تلاش در جهت منحرف کردن افکار جوانان و شناسایی افراد حزباللهی و حمله به سپاه و کتیبه و انداختن کواکب و شرکت در تیم نظامی، حمله به اتومبیل سپاه پاسداران و ترور چهار پاسدار در کوی دکترا، حمله به اتومبیل پاسداران و ترور پاسدار در خیابان راهنمایی، ترور یکی از پاسداران که از جبهه جنگ برکنده بود، شرکت در طرح فراری دادن یک منافق، شرکت در طرح شکار شهر و لئا محارب و باغی شناخته شد و به اعدام محکوم گردید.

۲- سید محسن محمدزاده، فرزند سید جیحی، بجرم هواداری فعال از منافقین در شرایط سیاسی و نظامی تا لحظه دستگیری، شرکت در کارهای ایدئولوژی سیاسی منافقین و متول نفی و دترنار امور مالی سازمان در مشهد، عضو یک تیم نظامی، متول مالی و تدارکات مشهد، معاون اجرایی، متول نظامی خود، زخمی نمودن یک پاسدار در هنگام دستگیری و فرار، صلح بودن به کت کسری در هنگام دستگیری لئا محارب و باغی شناخته شد و به اعدام محکوم شد.

۳- شهرام بهرامی، فرزند احمد بجرم هواداری فعال و تشکیلاتی در نازهای سیاسی و نظامی، تشکیل انجمن دانشآموزان مسلمان در خزرستان الکترونیک و رابط بین سازمان و انجمن، فعالیت در قسمت انتظامات سپاه جیش ملی منافقین، ضبط فیلمهای انقلابی تلویزیون و ساختاری روی آنها بنفع منافقین و فعالیت گسترده در جهت نابین فیلم، داشتن مسئولیت نمایندگی، استناد کالنتیکالی از منزل خانوادگی و رفت و آمد اعضای سازمان، پناه دادن به منافقین در منزل، متول صفتی و عادی سازی خانه تین، متول بخش تبلیغات منافقین و متول تلفن خانه تین، متول منزل و عادی سازی و تبلیغات.

۴- محمد قاسم جلالی، ...

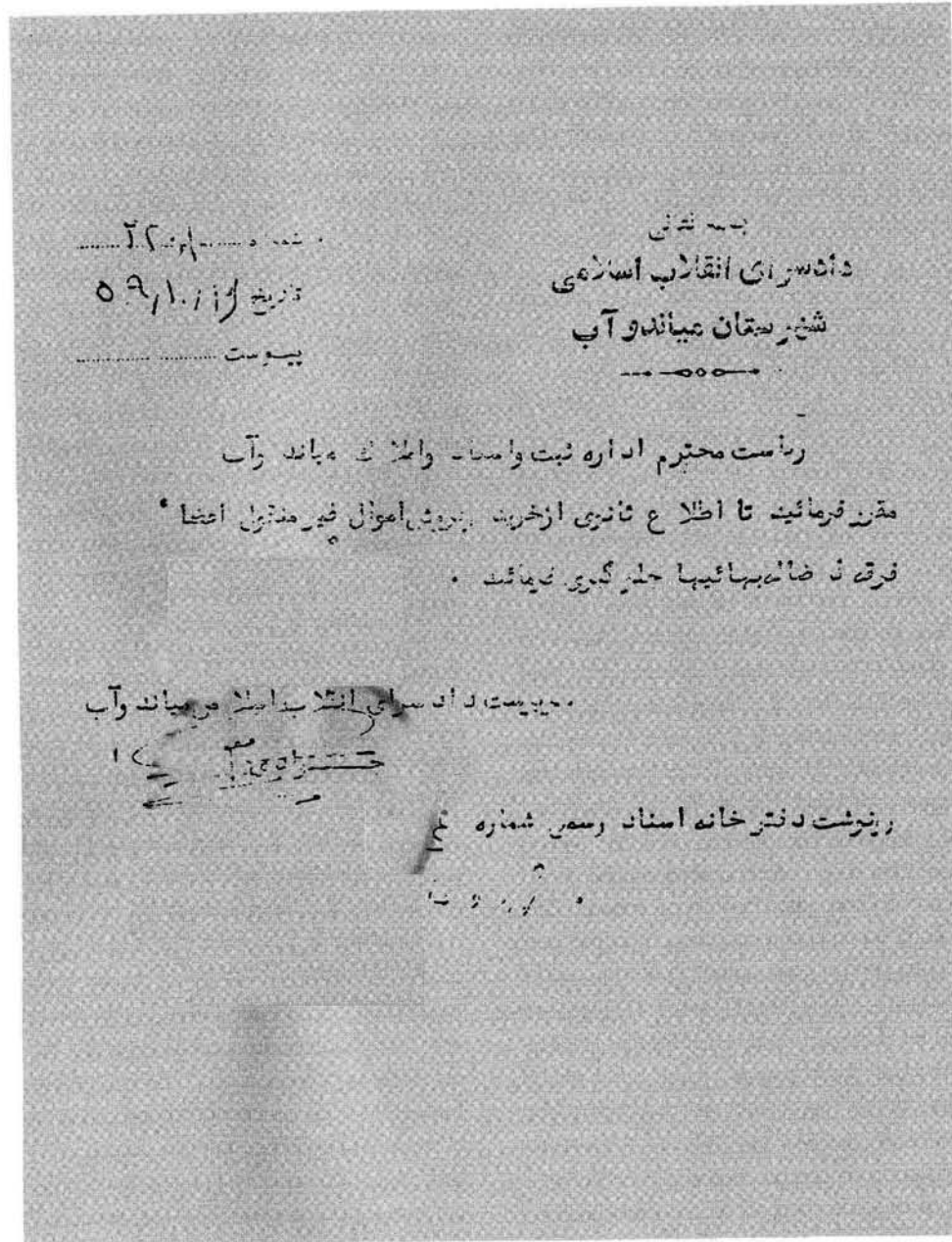
و نشریات سازمان، متول اداره دوکارگاه تولید نشریه، اقدام به شناسایی افراد حزباللهی به منظور ترور و برتاب معاصر، تهیه نماز آیات، ترک در حمله به ستاد انتخاباتی شهید رجایی با مسلسل یوزی و کت و نارنجک، ساختن مسئولیت جیم عنایت ویژه، اقدام به ترور چند حزباللهی منجمله برادر صفتی و رضایی، شرکت در عملیات فرار یک منافق محارب از بیمارستان مشهد، مبارزه اتومبیل به منظور اجرای اهداف سوم سازمان، شرکت در حمله به مرکز سپاه مشهد و کتیبه حواججه بیع، طرح حمله به کمیته مرکزی انقلاب اسلامی مشهد، محارب و باغی و متول می اراضی شناخته و محکوم به اعدام گردید.

۵- فرزندان محمد تقی پوریشان، متول تبلیغ و ترویج برای هند اسلامی بهائیت در داخل کشور جمهوری اسلامی و عامل ترویج برای مذکور در خارج از کشور بوسیله فرزندان و صرف و خرج بیستادها، مسلمان در جهت تکمیل بنافع بهائیت و به الحراف کشیدن افراد مسلمان، کمک عالی به بهائیت از بیستادها مسلمان به عنوان مستمری، کمک به دولت سهیوسی ناس، سامرت به اسرائیل و ترویج برای بهائیت در بین دانشآموزان تحت تعلیم خود، نوشتن مقالات ضد اسلامی چون مقاله چرا بای سید لئا بجزند و نمونه بارز نقد خیالارض شناخته و محکوم به اعدام شد.

۶- عبدالرضا مهدیزاده، فرزند عبدالحمید با نامهای مستعار اسماعیل و ایوب بجرم هواداری فعال در جهت سازمان منافقین که موازنه اتهامات با به اعتراضات خودش شرح زیر است: فعالیتهای مستمر و بیگانه سیاسی - نظامی فرهنگی و تبلیغاتی بنفع سازمان مذکور، عضویت در خانه های تین، مسئول سرکوبی حکومت اسلامی، داشتن مسئولیت تدارکات صفتی نهاد اجتماعی در شرایط نظامی و شرکت در قسمت ساط، ناشن یک قبده الحجه کت کسری اسار خفیف هنگام دستگیری، خریدن و بهرام داشتن یک کلاهگیر جهت تمییز قیانه، داشتن مسئولیت رهبری خانواده های که فرزندانشان به اتهام فعالیتها ضد انقلابی دستگیر و بازداشت بوده و تحریک آنها به منظور محوم به سپاه و جمع آوری اطلاعات و اخبار از زندانیان و وضعیت سپاه و با توجه به محتویات پرونده جرم نامبرده مسلم و محرز و نامبرده محارب با خدا رسول و باغی شناخته شد و محکوم به اعدام شد.

۷- محمد قاسم جلالی، ...

Newspaper article (*Kayhán*, Tehran, No. 11577, May 3, 1982) reporting the verdict of the revolutionary court in Mashhad, condemning a Bahá'í, Aziz Gulshani, to death. The eight counts of the verdict all refer explicitly to Bahá'í activities. The article concludes: "Therefore, Mr. Gulshani is a *murtad* [apostate], is an infamous example of the corrupt on earth, and is sentenced to death."



Order from the Department of Justice under the Islamic Republic (#2208, January 1981) to the Registrar of Deeds and Properties, Miyanduab, warning that any commercial dealing with “members of the depraved Bahá'í sect” is forbidden.

merely another instance of excessive revolutionary zeal, the understandable reaction of a suffering people bent on purging their homeland from a corrupt social order. Since the Bahá'í community is alleged to have been a part of this order,

it was bound to attract hostility.¹¹ The history of the Bahá'í community's experience in Iran not only fails to support this thesis, but also contradicts it in almost every significant detail.

11. See, for example, a public statement issued by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Buenos Aires, Argentina, September 26, 1979:

On the 17th of Shahrivar, the first anniversary of Black Friday, the day on which many Iranians died [in riots against the Pahlavi regime], faithful Muslims were mourning the whole country. In Shíráz, the mourners began to destroy the birthplace of Ali Mohamed, the Báb, and the security forces and the guards of the house were not able to stop them doing so, as this could have resulted in the martyrdom of many Muslim champions of Shíráz.

In fact, the house was demolished and eventually razed in a series of attacks through September and October, led by mullahs and government officials. The regime is currently constructing a public roadway across the former site, an act which involves the destruction of a portion of the old city of Shíráz, one of the historical treasures of Iran.

I.

The Bahá'ís

IN EXAMINING THE PERSECUTION experienced by the Bahá'ís of Iran, it will be helpful to have an understanding of the beliefs they profess. Iranian Bahá'ís come from the same Persian and Ázerbáijáni ethnic backgrounds as do the rest of the population of their country. They represent, as well, a cross-section of Iran's social classes. Only their adherence to their religious beliefs distinguishes them from their fellow countrymen, and it is these beliefs which have aroused most of the hostility vented on them by fanatical elements among their Muslim fellow citizens.

The Bahá'í Faith is the most recent of the world's independent religions.¹² From obscure beginnings in Persia during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is now spread throughout the world, embracing believers from most of the races, nations, and cultures on earth. Based entirely on the teachings of its founders, the Bahá'í Faith is a distinct religion rather than a sect or reform movement within one of the earlier traditions. At the same time, it represents an original creation: it did not arise out of a syncretistic movement to form a new religion out of beliefs and institutions selected from existing systems. In the words of Arnold Toynbee, an authority on world religions:

Baha'ism is an independent religion on a par with Islam, Christianity, and the other recognized world religions. Baha'ism is not a sect of some other religion; it is a separate religion, it has the same status as the other recognized religions.¹³

12. For a survey of the Bahá'í Faith's history and teachings see John Huddleston, *The Earth is but One Country*.

13. In a letter to a Turkish lawyer, Dr. N. Kunter, August 12, 1959, published in the *Bahá'í Journal* (London: November, 1959, no. 141, p. 4). The letter was apparently written in support of the Turkish Bahá'í community's appeal against the application to Bahá'ís of regulations adopted by Turkish civil authorities to control extremist Muslim factions.

A Brief History

THE NEW FAITH came into existence through the teachings of two successive founders. The first, a young Persian merchant known to history as the Báb, announced in Shíráz, in May 1844, that he was the bearer of a message from God, whom the Shí'ih branch of Islam had long expected under the title "the Twelfth Imám."¹⁴ Central to the Báb's teaching was the mission of preparing mankind for the advent of "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest," the universal divine messenger anticipated in the scriptures of all the major religions.¹⁵ During the course of widespread attacks on his followers, incited by the Muslim clergy, the Báb was executed in the city of Tabríz, in 1850.¹⁶ In 1863, however, one of his leading disciples who had survived the pogroms, a Persian nobleman named Bahá'u'lláh, announced that he was the messenger for whom the Báb had come to prepare the way. Partly because of the force of his own person and teaching, and partly because of unusual marks of distinction conferred upon him by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh quickly attracted the allegiance of virtually all the Bábís and began a thirty-year mission which brought into existence the worldwide religion and community that today bear his name.¹⁷ His teachings are contained in a vast

14. The Báb (lit., "Door" or "Gate", i.e., of the expected universal revelation) was born Mirzá 'Alí-Muhammad, in Shíráz on October 20, 1819.

15. Bahá'ís, nevertheless, regard the Báb as an independent manifestation of God.

16. For accounts of the lives of the founders of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, see H.M. Balyuzi, *The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh*.

17. Bahá'u'lláh (lit., "Glory of God") was born Mirzá Husayn 'Alí, a member of a noble family, in Tehran on November 12, 1817. It was the Báb who first formally addressed Mirzá Husayn 'Alí as "Bahá'u'lláh." Subsequently, in a celebrated passage in his writings, the Báb instructed those that believed in him: "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks to his Lord, for He will assuredly be made manifest."

body of writings in both Persian and Arabic, regarded by Bahá'ís as the source of authority in their faith.¹⁸

One of the earliest Western scholars to become interested in Bábí and Bahá'í history was Edward Granville Browne, the Cambridge orientalist. Encountering it first in the late nineteenth century, in the writings of the French scholar, Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, who had visited Persia and studied the Bábí movement shortly after the Báb's death, Browne conceived the idea that the young faith represented the beginnings of a new, independent world religion. He saw it as offering a unique opportunity for scholars to examine this rare phenomenon at first hand:

. . . for here he [the student of religion] may contemplate such personalities as, by lapse of time, pass into heroes and demi-gods still unobscured by myth and fable; he may examine by the light of concurrent and independent testimony one of those strange outbursts of enthusiasm, faith, fervent devotion, and indomitable heroism or fanaticism, if you will, which we are accustomed to associate with the earlier history of the human race; he may witness, in a word, the birth of a faith which may not impossibly win a place amidst the great religions of the world.¹⁹

The history of the ninety years since Browne took up his study has vindicated his initial judgement. Slowly but certainly, a new and independent religious system has taken shape and become established in virtually every part of the world, a system entirely separate from the Islamic milieu out of which it emerged. The opinion of Toynbee,

Selections from the Writings of the Báb. He indicated to several of his followers that they would recognize and serve "Him Whom God Will make Manifest," all of whom were subsequently among those who accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the one referred to in these promises.

18. One of Bahá'u'lláh's most important works, *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Book of Certitude), is available in an English translation of English translations from Bahá'u'lláh's writings are *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* and *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

19. E.G. Browne, Introduction to *A Traveller's Narrative*, by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. from the original Persian, p. viii.

cited above, has been echoed, albeit in a rather different spirit, by official spokesmen for Islamic institutions. As early as 1924, a Sunní appellate court in Egypt concluded, in a test case submitted to it for judgement, that: "The Bahá'í Faith is a new religion, entirely independent [i.e., of Islam]. . . . No Bahá'í, therefore, can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa, even as no Buddhist, Brahmin, or Christian can be regarded a Muslim or vice-versa."²⁰

Bahá'í Belief

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH TEACHES that all truth, including revelation, is relative. God, the essence of truth, is so far beyond his creation that, throughout all eternity, men will never be able to form any image of God nor attain to anything but a steadily deepening appreciation of God's qualities or attributes. These qualities are pre-eminently manifested, from age to age, through a succession of prophets or messengers who reveal God's purpose for humanity. Although these divine messengers have been viewed throughout history as independent and even exclusive manifestations of God, Bahá'ís regard them as the agents of a single, progressively unfolding divine process. Thus, Bahá'ís pay equal reverence to Abraham, Moses, the Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad who, for Bahá'ís, are exponents of one universal faith and, only incidentally, are founders of separate religious traditions.²¹ Through the civilizing influence of the successive revelations of God, man's moral, spiritual, and intellectual capacities are released.²²

20. Judgement of the Appellate Court of Beba, Egypt, cited in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 365.

21. Bahá'ís do not accept the doctrine that God incarnates Himself in his messengers. Although the prophets are considered to occupy a unique station above that of humankind, their relationship to God is that of perfect manifestations of God's attributes.

22. "Whatever duty Thou [God] hast prescribed unto Thy servants . . . is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves." Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 4-5.

Social Teachings

THE CONCEPT of the oneness of mankind is the pivotal theme of Bahá'u'lláh's writings: "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."²³ Most of Bahá'u'lláh's other social teachings are auxiliary to this principle, since their application would serve chiefly to reduce conflict between groups and individuals and thus create a climate favourable to the establishment of unity. He places strong emphasis, for example, on the abolition of prejudices of all kinds, warmly encouraging not only close association, but also intermarriage among his followers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

By insisting that it is the responsibility of each individual to investigate truth for himself, Bahá'u'lláh seeks to break down the power of religious tradition and attachment to ideologies. Further, since truth is one, it is not possible for something to be scientifically false yet religiously true; if religious dogma is found to be contrary to scientific evidence, it has no place in the spiritual life of a rational being.

Closely related to these concerns is the obligation of Bahá'ís to educate their children and the assertion of Bahá'u'lláh that it is the responsibility of society to make certain that the means for universal education are provided. Women and men are equal in the sight of God and must, therefore, have complete equality of opportunity and respect. Indeed, should the necessity arise, Bahá'í parents are enjoined to give priority to the education of girls, as mothers are the educators of the succeeding generation.²⁴ Justice is said by Bahá'u'lláh to be "the best beloved of all things" in the sight of God, and considerable attention is given in the Bahá'í writings to the responsibility of society to assure economic justice among its various component groups.²⁵

23. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

24. For a compilation of Bahá'í writings on the subject, see *Bahá'í Education: A Compilation*.

25. "The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among people." Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 182.

Although Bahá'ís are forbidden by the scriptures of their faith to involve themselves in any form of partisan political activity, they are encouraged to give all possible support to efforts for the creation of world government.²⁶ Some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important writings call upon the rulers of the world to create an "International Tribunal" to which nations will surrender whatever degree of sovereignty is necessary for the establishment of world peace and disarmament, and to accept the formation of an international police force powerful enough to assure that the judgements of the tribunal are carried out. An auxiliary international language, an international system of weights and measures, and agencies which will assure a progressively more equitable distribution of the world's wealth are all subjects which come within the scope of the writings of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. There is hardly a tenet of this credo which is not sharply in conflict with some doctrine of Shí'ih Islam, the dominant religion of Iran.

The Bahá'í Community

BEFORE EXAMINING this conflict, brief reference should be made to the system of institutions established by the founder of the Bahá'í Faith for the governing of the Bahá'í community. These also represent a sharp contrast to the ecclesiastical system of Shí'ih Islam. Neither clergy nor rituals are needed in the new "age of man's maturity," Bahá'u'lláh says, because universal education will make it possible for virtually every individual to understand for himself or herself the spiritual requirements of human existence. The central principle of the age is the process of consultation, which He states is the key to well-being for both the individual and society. The affairs of the Bahá'í community are administered by "Spiritual Assemblies" of nine persons, democratically elected each year at both local and national

26. Bahá'ís regard the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization as initial stages in the gradual establishment of world government.

levels. Nominations and electioneering are forbidden, and the elected members are determined by simple plurality vote, both men and women being eligible. Other institutions, with memberships appointed for specific terms, provide counselling to both assemblies and individual believers, but there is no Bahá'í institution endowed with the sacerdotal or interpretative functions associated with an ecclesiastical order. Once every five years, the members of the national spiritual assemblies of the Bahá'í world elect a nine-member "Universal House of Justice," the governing body which has supreme legislative and administrative powers in the international Bahá'í community.²⁷

When Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892, the community of his followers consisted of fewer than a hundred thousand believers living more or less on sufferance in Iran and neighbouring Islamic states, with isolated groups in other countries of the Orient. Today, the Bahá'í Faith has become one of the world's most rapidly growing religions, embracing some three million adherents from almost every racial, cultural, and national origin on earth, and carrying out a broad range of activities in over 350 sovereign states and major territories. An integrated administrative system has evolved at local, national, and international levels, and in most instances has won formal recognition from civil authorities. At the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community, the agency serving as the faith's international spokesman, is accredited as a member of the body of Non-Governmental Organizations, with consultative status in the Economic and Social Council.²⁸

Bahá'u'lláh's writings and those of the Báb have been translated and published in over 700 languages. Houses of worship, schools, administrative headquarters, and community centres have been erected throughout the world, and properties for future developments acquired. Although proselytism which invades the privacy

of others is prohibited in the faith's scriptures, the community makes vigorous efforts to bring its teachings to the public throughout the world, using films, radio stations, audio and visual cassettes, conferences, university courses, publicity in the regular media, pamphlet literature, home study groups, and correspondence courses.²⁹

The Bahá'í Community and the Iranian Issue

IRANIAN BAHÁ'ÍS have played an energetic part in this worldwide expansion, but, through that very process, have become a steadily smaller minority within the Bahá'í community. Today, they represent perhaps one tenth of the faith's membership, their numbers being far exceeded by the community in India and being rapidly gained upon by others in Africa and South America. Though fewer in number than the Iranian believers, the North American Bahá'ís have played as important a role in recent years, because of a special mission to promote the Bahá'í teachings conferred upon them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh.³⁰

Bahá'ís the world over form a single community held together by adherence to a common body of belief and submission to a unified system of institutions. Consequently, it is these several million people from many races and nations who have felt themselves outraged and threatened by what is today occurring in Iran. What has been regarded by the Shí'ih clergy as the suppression of heresy has been experienced by the Bahá'ís of the world as a campaign of religious genocide of which all of them are, to one extent or another, the victims. It is this circumstance, little appreciated by Iran's Islamic rulers, which has generated the widespread outcry now attracting the attention of governments, media, and populations throughout the world.

29. Details may be found in *ibid*.

30. The mandate to the two North American Bahá'í communities is contained in a series of letters published under the title *Tablets of the Divine Plan*.

27. The most recent election of the House of Justice took place in April 1983.

28. Current statistics of the Bahá'í community are provided in *The Seven Year Plan, 1979-1986*.

II. Qájár Rule, 1844-1925

PRIOR TO THE RECENT ISLAMIC REVOLUTION, a deep-seated prejudice against the Bahá'ís and their religion characterized not only Iran's Islamic clergy and the illiterate masses, but also many among the country's educated élite and middle class. The prejudice was instinctive and communicated itself to many Western observers. Michael Fischer, a generally sympathetic commentator on the Iranian revolution, notes, for example, that: even the exercise of routine civil functions by Bahá'ís was seen as proof of a "Bahá'í conspiracy."³¹ Richard W. Cottam, author of *Nationalism in Iran*, pointed out the problem of even discussing the subject of the Bahá'í Faith in a country in which the word "Bábí" has long been freely used as an epithet, along with such words as "infidel," to describe anyone to whom the speaker is strongly opposed.³² This prejudice is probably the first important point to grasp for any Westerner wishing to understand the situation of the Bahá'ís in modern Iran.

The second point is that, in the land of the Bahá'í Faith's origin, the prejudice is, paradoxically, combined with an almost universal ignorance of this faith's nature, teachings, and history. For the past century a curtain of silence has surrounded the subject. The Bahá'í community has at all times been denied the use of the usual means of communication with the general public: radio, television, newspapers, films, free distribution of literature, or public lectures. The academic community in Iran has entirely ignored the existence of the faith founded there; the subject is not treated in university courses or textbooks. Indeed, census figures which provided statistics on all of the other religious and ethnic minorities in Iran were omitted for the Bahá'í

community, the largest religious minority of all. Coupled with this, the public mind has been subjected, for decades, to abusive propaganda from Shí'ih Muslim clergy, in which the role of the Bahá'í community in Iran, its size, its beliefs, and its objectives have been misrepresented.

The Initial Persecutions, 1844-1853

BOTH THE IGNORANCE and the prejudice originated in the tragic events that surrounded the beginning of the Bábí and Bahá'í faiths in nineteenth century Persia, to which reference has already been made. To the Shí'ih Muslim clergy, the claims made by the Báb (and later by Bahá'u'lláh) were not merely heretical, but a threat to the foundations of Islam. Orthodox Islam holds that Muhammad was the "Seal of the Prophets" and thus the bearer of God's final revelation to mankind. Certain other faiths, principally Judaism and Christianity, are considered to be valid but defective religious systems founded in earlier revelations which were later corrupted by their followers.³³ Only Islam has remained pure and undiminished because its repository, the Qur'án, represents the authentic words of the prophet. From this baseline, Muslim theology has gone on to assert that Islam contains all that mankind will ever require until the Day of Judgement and that no further revelation of the

33. Muslims use the term "People of the Book" to refer to communities like the Christians and Jews who have religions founded on specific revelations from God. Recognized revelations, however, are only those explicitly mentioned in the Qur'án. Consequently such belief systems as Buddhism and Hinduism would not qualify for this status. Strictly speaking, Zoroastrians would also be excluded but they have been given a kind of special dispensation in Shí'ih Iran, partly because their small community (an estimated 20,000 members) has never attracted converts from Islam and partly because of their close association with the great ages of Persia's past.

31. Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, p. 281, n.8.

32. Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, p. 88.

divine purpose can or will occur.³⁴ Conversion from Islam to any other faith is apostasy and deserving of death.

The Báb's declaration of his mission constituted, therefore, a challenge to the central pillar of this theological system. For Shí'ism, the dominant branch of Islam in Persia, the challenge was especially acute. Shí'ism is distinguished from the larger Sunní branch of Islam, which predominates in much of the Arab world, by its insistence that Muhammad appointed the line of his male descendants as imáms or successors. The last of these, the Twelfth Imám, who is believed to have vanished from sight in the ninth century, is identified by Shí'is with the redeemer whose advent all Islam awaits on the Day of Judgement.³⁵ Over the centuries, Shí'ih dogma has accorded unlimited authority over all human affairs to the person of the Twelfth or Hidden Imám. Indeed, it has been argued that the shahs themselves reign as merely the Imám's trustees and will, on his appearance, be called upon to surrender the throne of Persia to the Imám. This theological construct made it relatively easy for the 'ulamá, the Shí'ih clergy, to persuade the Qájár rulers that not only ecclesiastical but also political authority could be at issue in the Báb's claim to fulfil the prophecy of the Imám's advent.

Throughout Persia, the followers of the new faith were denounced by the clergy as enemies of God. When the resulting mob attacks failed to halt the rapid spread of the Báb's message, the government moved with armed force against the principal centres of Bábí influence. The Báb had, by this time, been imprisoned in a remote fortress in the northwestern corner of Persia and his followers, acting on the Islamic moral traditions in which they had been raised, vigorously defended themselves in a series of engagements

34. Muslims do not, of course, accept the Bahá'í idea that revelation is a progressive unfolding of the divine Will.

35. None of the imáms after the first one, Muhammad's son-in-law, 'Alí, was ever able to establish his authority in the Muslim world, and most were murdered. They are the chief saints and martyrs of Shí'ih tradition.

which resulted in humiliating defeats for the government troops.³⁶ Once the Bábí garrisons had finally been overcome, the mullahs began a determined campaign to root out the heretical teachings. The Báb himself was executed in 1850 after a trial by an ecclesiastical court. This action precipitated an attack on the Qájár ruler, Násiri'd-Dín Shah, by a deranged Bábí armed with a pistol, an outrage which removed the last restraints on the part of the imperial authorities.

The horror of those days, little more than a century ago, has left its scar on the Iranian psyche.³⁷ The circumstances may be appreciated in the following account by the then Austrian military attaché in Tehran, who resigned his post in protest:

But follow me my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, with gouged-out eyes, must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or where the *bázár* is illuminated with unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the *bázár*, preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep that now the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly-extinguished lamp.

Not seldom it happens that the unwearying ingenuity of the Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will skin the soles of the Bábí's

36. Such defense was an entirely acceptable action in Islamic belief. The Qur'án permits Muslims to defend themselves but requires that, if the attacking party seeks peace, the defenders must accept it and not seek vengeance. In both of the two principal sieges, the leaders of the government forces sought truces and gave the Bábí assurances of peace written on copies of the Qur'án. As soon as the garrisons surrendered, however, they were massacred because the 'ulamá declared promises to heretics to be null and void. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 41-42.

37. See F. Kazemzadeh, "For Bahá'ís in Iran, A Threat of Extinction," *New York Times*, op. ed., August 6, 1981.

feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run. . . . Give him the *coup de grâce!* Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner swings the whip, and — I myself have had to witness it — the unhappy victim of hundred-fold tortures runs! . . . I saw corpses torn by nearly 150 bullets. The more fortunate suffered strangulation, stoning or suffocation: they were bound before the muzzle of a mortar, cut down with swords, or killed with dagger thrusts, or blows from hammers and sticks.³⁸

Later Attacks, 1853-1925

THE ADVENT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH brought the elaboration of the body of social teachings already discussed. Expressed in a steady stream of essays, books, and letters, and argued in a vigorous, lucid style that moved easily from contemporary events to quranic exegesis to the works of the great Súfí poets, Bahá'u'lláh's social message was as challenging to Islamic orthodoxy as was the new faith's theology.³⁹ The call for an international government created by the nation states of the world, most of them infidel in Muslim eyes, directly challenged a religious tradition which saw itself as possessing the one prescription for the political as well as the spiritual destiny of mankind.⁴⁰ Similarly, a system of universal education which would subordinate the curriculum of the seminaries to "Western" sciences (if, indeed, it would leave any place at all for some traditional ecclesiastical studies), seemed to threaten the moral fabric of Persian

society.⁴¹ Perhaps no Bahá'í teaching was so deeply offensive to Shí'ih orthodoxy as that which asserted the equality of the sexes. The Qur'án was explicit in declaring woman's status to be inferior.⁴² Although the use of the *chador* or veil long antedated Islam, it had become an article of faith for all Muslims and an enduring symbol of female inferiority.

Beyond these issues of belief and propriety, the 'ulamá were alarmed by the threat which the new religion posed to their own position in society and the economy. While generous in his praise of the contributions which the clergy of all faiths had made to the advancement of the race in ages past, Bahá'u'lláh asserted that mankind was now moving beyond the need for assistance of this kind. The point had a particularly direct application to the role of the Shí'ih clergy. The main-spring of Shí'ism is the doctrine of *taqlid* or imitation. The average man, dependent for salvation on right action but lacking the time or capacity for the necessary study of quranic law, stands in dire need of spiritual guidance. He fills this need by finding a spiritual guide to imitate, one whose life and learning demonstrate the necessary level of attainment. It is the clergy who perform this role for the masses and who are themselves followers of still more perfect mentors in the hierarchy of mujtahids and ayatollahs above them.⁴³ If, however, imitation of others is no longer the path to spiritual progress, the entire ecclesiastical structure and the vast system of

41. The *madrashah* is the Muslim theological school. Its curriculum gives priority to theology, philosophy, canon law, scriptural exegesis, and similar concerns.

42. Testimony of a woman, for example, has only half the weight of testimony by a man under quranic law. One of the anti-Islamic acts charged against Muhammad Rezá Shah by the Shí'ih clergy was his insistence in 1962, on giving women the franchise (Heikal, p. 86).

43. So, for example, there are today in Iran five "grand ayatollahs" as the apex of the structure, each of whom has established his right to serve as a supreme *marja'i-taqlid* or source of imitation. On occasion in the past one grand ayatollah has been regarded as having attained such distinction that he has been acclaimed the ultimate source of imitation. Despite his political power, Ayatollah Khomeini has not been regarded by his colleagues as meriting this theological position.

38. *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944*, account by Captain Alfred von Gumoens, p. 133.

39. Muslim opponents continued to use the term Bábí to refer to the members of the faith although the latter began designating themselves Bahá'ís when they accepted Bahá'u'lláh.

40. Islam does not make the sharp distinction between the secular and the spiritual which is characteristic of Christianity. All existence is the field of operation of God's Will. Muhammad's assumption of the government of the city of Medina effectively established the Muslim State, and extensive passages of the Qur'án relate to matters of social administration.

endowments, benefices, and fees which sustains it no longer have a reason for existence. These practical implications, together with Bahá'í theological and social principles, were seen by the 'ulamá as leading to the dismantling of the familiar world they dominated and in which they were totally invested.

During the remaining decades of the rule of the Qájár shahs, therefore, the Bahá'í community intermittently experienced attacks instigated by mullahs, seconded from time to time by local or provincial authorities. Under pressure from European governments, however, the later Qájár shahs refrained from further direct involvement in the pogroms and were even induced, on occasion, to restrain some of the worst excesses. During that time the Bahá'ís were a proscribed minority which survived only by keeping a low profile and by respecting Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition against violence, even in self-defense.⁴⁴ Because of the leading role which Muslim clerics took on both the royalist and constitutionalist sides of the political struggles of the late nineteenth century, the Bahá'ís were persecuted regardless of which faction was temporarily in the ascendant. In the words of Hamid Algar, a Shí'ih scholar who is essentially hostile to the Bahá'ís, the latter

came to occupy something of a position between the State and the ulama, not one enabling them to balance the two sides, but rather exposing them to blows which each side aimed at the other. The government, interested in maintaining order, would resist the persecution of the Bahá'ís by the ulama, but would equally, when occasion demanded, permit action against the Bahá'ís.⁴⁵

The establishment of the 1906 constitution, which theoretically brought a new era of liberty to Persia, in fact assured continuing discrimina-

tion against the Bahá'ís. Unlike the Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians whom they far outnumbered, the Bahá'ís were denied any form of recognition in the constitution and its attendant acts, with the result that they were legally "non-persons" in Persian public life.⁴⁶ Bahá'í marriages were not recognized, Bahá'ís could not count on redress in the courts, they were refused the right to operate schools, their literature was proscribed, their religious observances were at the mercy of capricious local officials, and they were exposed to whatever abuse their Muslim neighbours might wish to visit upon them. From time to time, a particularly hostile mullah would incite open violence against the Bahá'ís in a town or village, with only minimal interference from the civil authorities. Typical was an outbreak in the city of Yazd in 1903, described by a British medical missionary, Dr. Henry White:

No doubt you will have read in your papers of the terrible massacres among the sect called Babis in Persia. We in Yezd have been in the midst of the worst of it. . . .

The most heartrending details are coming to light. One of my wife's friends, a young newly-married woman, has lost husband, father, and father-in-law. Others have lost sons, brothers, and fathers. Many are absolutely ruined, and we must render what assistance we can.

A friend of mine, a large landowner, who lived in a town forty miles from Yezd, with whom I have stayed, was killed with all his male relatives, eight persons in all.

We could do comparatively little to help the sufferers, as by international law we are bound not to interfere in matters of internal politics, and at Ispahan, where there was a small outbreak, the Russian Consul was ordered to turn out a number of Babis who had taken refuge with him. It was with difficulty that those of us who had Babi servants were able to protect them.⁴⁷

46. This exclusion is made even more explicit in the new Islamic Constitution, in which the "tolerated minorities" are named in the constitution itself.

47. Momen, pp. 389-90.

44. Bahá'u'lláh taught that, "It is better to be killed than to kill." Bahá'ís are forbidden to bear arms except in service to a duly constituted government and then only when denied assignment to noncombatant duties.

45. Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran: 1785-1906*, p. 151.

III. The Pahlavi Regime, 1925 – 1979

WITH THE RISE of the Pahlavis in 1925, a number of important developments occurred which were to have major repercussions on the welfare of the Bahá'í community. It is difficult to remember today, as the Shí'ih clergy seek to obliterate every vestige of the Pahlavi regime, that 'ulamá were themselves among the principal allies of both Rezá Shah and his son, Muhammad Rezá Shah, during critical periods of their respective reigns. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of the Pahlavis having seized and maintained control of Iran for fifty-five years without the implicit and sometimes vigorously explicit, support of the Shí'ih establishment.

Rezá Khán's Coup d'État

BY 1921, FOLLOWING THE UPHEAVALS of the First World War, Iran appeared to be sinking into anarchy. It was relatively easy for a Cossack officer, Rezá Khán, with the support of his troops, the assistance of certain Persian politicians, and the complaisance of the British government, to march on Tehran and carry out a *coup d'état*.⁴⁸ Within a few months Rezá Khán had ousted his political allies and made himself Prime Minister. Temporarily, Ahmad Shah, last of the Qájár rulers, was maintained on the throne as a figurehead monarch, but it was apparent to all observers that Rezá Khán's intent was the dissolution of the monarchy and the establishment of an Iranian republic modelled on that of his hero, the Turkish reformer, Kamal Atatürk. In preparation for the realization of this objective, the army was expanded and resistance by various ethnic minorities and opposition groups was ruthlessly suppressed.

The plan was called into question in 1924

48. A brief survey of the rise to power of Rezá Khán can be found in Wilfrid Knapp, "1921-1941: The Period of Reza Shah," *Twentieth Century Iran*, eds., H. Amirsadeghi and R.W. Ferrier, pp. 23-27.

when the triumph of the Atatürk regime resulted in the abolition not merely of the Ottoman monarchy but of the Caliphate itself and the disestablishment of the Sunní Muslim clergy in Turkey.⁴⁹ The lesson was not lost on the Shí'ih hierarchy in Persia. Widespread public opposition to the idea of a republic was generated, and Rezá Khán was given to understand that a republican form of government was contrary to the Islamic faith.

With the cynicism and political sagacity which were to characterize his regime, Rezá Khán expressed his submission to this principle of Shí'ih theology and hastened to Qom to seek the counsel of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The latter advised that the best course would be for Rezá Khán simply to depose the Qájár ruler and assume the crown himself. This was accomplished on December 5, 1925; Rezá Khán drove to the meeting of the Constituent Assembly in a glass covered coach drawn by six horses and was formally recognized as Shah. Prominent ayatollahs participated in the ceremony and presented a holy relic of the Imám Husayn to the new monarch in token of their recognition of the Shah as not merely head of State but regent for the Hidden Imám. Very shortly after, the name of the new Shah was duly introduced into the sacred formula for the *khutbih*, the daily prayers and sermon in all of the mosques.

As had happened to most of the earlier alliances between various Qájár shahs and the 'ulamá, this new partnership began to break down shortly after it was formed. Rezá Sháh's program of modernization threatened virtually every aspect of the clergy's dominant position: plans for a secular school system, the introduction of the provisions of the Code Napoléon, new modes of dress, the introduction of the solar calendar, and a special endowments law aimed at

49. Ibid.

bringing the clergy's vast economic preserves under the control of the State.⁵⁰

Rezā Shah and the Bahá'ís

MANY OF THE MULLAHS continued to accept posts and honours under the Shah, but resentment began to rise among the more fundamentalist Muslims. Significantly, one of the epithets which this growing opposition used against the regime was the all-purpose term "Bábí" which was indiscriminately applied to reformist tendencies. It was no doubt the new Shah's appreciation of the power of this prevailing prejudice that was responsible for his collusion in the first major anti-Bahá'í outbreak of his regime. In April of 1926, only a few months after Rezā Sháh's coronation, a massacre of Bahá'ís of the town of Jahrum was incited by a local mullah, Siyyid Alf-i-Pishnamáz. The British consul in Shíráz, Herbert Chick, described the attack in a report to his superiors on April 12:

It seems that for several days previous to the 7th instant, this son [mullah] who has apparently inherited his father's fanaticism,⁵¹ and certain other sayyids of the Soulet connection had hurled abuse and invective from the pulpits against the Bahais. To what extent, if any, the Bahais riposted or remonstrated my informants were silent. But this obviously inspired campaign culminated on the 7th in thirteen adult Bahais and one babe of fifteen months being bludgeoned and stabbed and hacked to death in their houses and the streets.⁵²

Thanks to the energy of the local military governor, Amir Lashgar, the mullahs and seminarians who had carried out the murders were arrested, and instructions were sought from the central authorities in Tehran. To the dismay of French and American diplomatic observers who sought

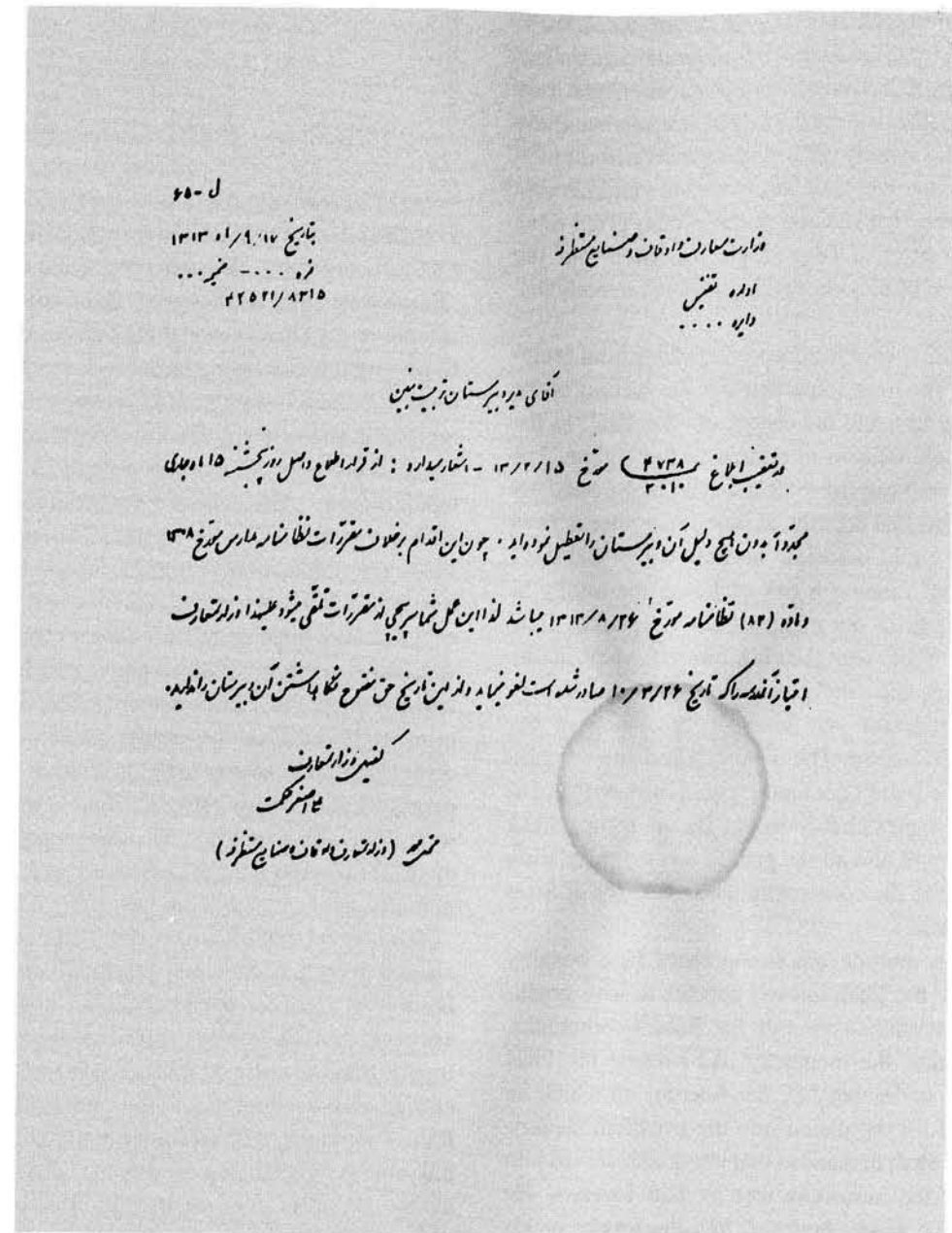
to intervene, it was the victims rather than the perpetrators of the attack on whom the Shah vented his disapproval. Chick reported in June that:

... His Majesty the Shah has had sent to all postal and telegraph offices orders not to accept petitions or complaints from Bahais. No one has been suitably punished for the massacre of the Bahais at Jahrum on April 7th; the Seyyids [sic] arrested have been released.⁵³

Once his regime was more firmly settled, Rezā Shah began to give indications that he might be prepared to extend a limited measure of tolerance and protection to his Bahá'í subjects. By that time, more than half a century had passed since the pogroms of the early Bábí period, and hostility to the community was slowly diminishing, even though the general prejudice remained. As the Shah's modernization program gathered momentum, certain principles with which the Bahá'ís were identified came to enjoy a vogue among the educated classes. The Bahá'í community began to hope that a new and more liberal era had dawned and that they might be able to play a part in it.

From Rezā Shah's perspective, the Bahá'í minority appeared to have a high potential for usefulness. Apart from their progressive social teachings, the Bahá'ís held to two religious tenets which would have commended them to any regime in a period of crisis: loyalty to civil government and avoidance of all involvement in partisan political agitation. Further, they were without either foreign protectors or any independent means of redress in the Iranian social order.

During the early years of his reign, Rezā Shah appointed a number of Bahá'ís to important positions in the civil administration, particularly those branches of government related to finance.⁵⁴ Although, as a salve to the mullahs, laws were passed restricting the general employment of Bahá'ís in the civil service, minor



Order from Deputy Minister of Education under Rezā Shah (December 1934), formally closing the Tarbiat High School, a Bahá'í institution, because of its observance of Bahá'í holy days.

50. Ibid., pp. 27-51 and Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, passim.

51. Earlier dispatches had indicated that the father of this siyyid, a leading Islamic mujtahid, had earlier been responsible for the massacres of Bahá'ís in Nayríz and other centres.

52. Momen, p. 465.

53. Ibid., p. 470.

54. Banani, pp. 25-27.

improvements in the position of the Bahá'ís began to appear. Bahá'ís could count on a limited degree of protection from persecution and were eventually permitted to open schools. As these schools rapidly gained a reputation for excellence, the monarch was moved to enrol his own children.⁵⁵ It seemed possible that, given time, the restrictive laws might be lifted and the miasma of prejudice and hostility eventually dissipate.

A number of factors prevented this from occurring. The most important was the success of the clergy in using the charge of "Bábism" as the one safe weapon in criticizing the regime. The word still carried so deep a taint in the minds of Persians that not even as powerful a ruler as Rezá Shah could associate himself with "Bábism" without running a risk of losing the loyalty of segments of the population. At the same time, Rezá Shah was showing himself adept at the "divide and rule" philosophy which was to play an important part in the perpetuation of the Pahlavi regime. The more exposed and vulnerable the Bahá'í community was, the more dependent it presumably would be upon the ruler's good will and all the greater was the temptation to abuse the community when interests of State dictated.

This attitude was strengthened by a hostility which the Shah himself appears to have gradually developed towards the Bahá'í community. For him, the monarchy had become the focal point of Iranian life, the fulcrum on which he could lift the nation into the twentieth century. Rezá Shah demanded that those who served him place the monarchy first in their loyalties. He became aware, however, that the loyalty of his Bahá'í subjects was a derived one. Since loyalty to civil authority was one of the tenets of their faith, it was conditioned by that faith. Bahá'í concepts and laws affected the members' relationship to the monarch in both large questions and small. Highly competent believers would serve readily in the civil service, but refused absolutely to accept political posts. Since the

55. Ibid., p. 96.

Bahá'í writings forbid the kissing of hands, Bahá'í army officers and civil officials would bend low over the Shah's hand, but would refrain from touching it with their lips, as protocol expected them to do.

Formalization of Discrimination against Bahá'ís

THE RESULT was that the government began to formalize a policy of discrimination which was to characterize the treatment of the Bahá'í community for the next five decades. The Bahá'ís became, in effect, a safety valve for the regime. Bahá'ís were the one target against whom the clergy were permitted to vent their mounting frustration with the restrictions under which even the 'ulamá had to live. Beginning in 1933, the publication of Bahá'í literature was banned; Bahá'í marriage was deemed concubinage, and prison sentences were set for those who admitted to marrying according to Bahá'í law; a number of Bahá'í cemeteries were expropriated; Bahá'ís in the public service were demoted or fired; attacks in the press were freely permitted; and eventually the Bahá'í schools were closed.⁵⁶ Once again, the community sank to its former status as a proscribed and hated minority.

The annual report prepared by the newly-elected National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran, for the period 1935-1936, for example, provides a bleak picture of the life of Iranian Bahá'ís under the first of the Pahlavis: the closing of Bahá'í meetings, the confiscation of Bahá'í literature and even calendars, the dismissal of public employees who had been found to be Bahá'ís, the seizure by the postal authorities of correspondence and records, the expulsion of Bahá'í children from their schools, the refusal by telegraph offices to transmit appeals from injured members of the faith, the imprisonment of believers on religious grounds, and attacks on the minority religion from the pulpits of mosques in the presence of civil and military officials. The incidents involved Tehran,

56. Ibid., p. 97. (See illustrations previous and facing pages.)



An article describing the Muslim clergy's role in the closing of Bahá'í schools during the reign of Rezá Shah. The article was published in the Tehran newspaper, *Nabard'i' Millet*, August 6, 1979, as part of a review of the history of the Pahlavi regime.

most of the provincial capitals, and scores of towns and villages.

Although all of these incidents were documented in increasingly urgent petitions to the central authorities for redress, such appeals met with no response. On the contrary, it soon became apparent that Rezá Shah, himself, was the moving spirit behind many of the abuses. The Shah took a personal hand in the campaign to force army officers and civil servants to recant their faith. When these pressures failed to achieve their end, Rezá Shah ordered the acting Chief of Staff, General Zarghámi, to issue a general order stating that "the religion with which the Bahá'í community identifies itself has no official status" and "that the word 'Bahá'í' should on no account be permitted to appear in identification forms":

Officers who in their identification forms or elsewhere describe themselves as Bahá'ís must if they are conscripts be deprived of their rank and finish their term of service as privates, and if they belong to the regular army they must after being deprived of their rank be imprisoned until they reimburse the Government for their education. His Majesty has especially decreed that leaving the religions column blank in itself constitutes a sort of avowal of faith and this too should not be accepted.⁵⁷

The difference between the kind of persecution which the Iranian Bahá'ís experienced under Rezá Shah and that which they had endured during the earlier decades will already have suggested itself. Under the largely incompetent rule of the Qájárs, the persecution of the Bahá'ís had been a spasmodic affair, limited by whatever whim or passing interests of state might motivate the ruler of the day. By the end of Násiri'd-Dín Shah's reign, the State had become distracted by the assaults of the Constitutionalist movement which had assumed the dimensions of a revolutionary upheaval. While, as we have noted, the

Bahá'í community experienced attacks from both sides in the dispute, the energies which might have gone into a more concentrated effort to suppress the Bahá'í Faith had instead been diverted to the political arena where the Bahá'í question was essentially irrelevant.⁵⁸

Very different was the experience of the Iranian Bahá'ís under the first of the Pahlavis. A quasi-totalitarian state had begun to take tentative shape in Iran, and its treatment of its Bahá'í minority, like all other matters of public polity, was characterized by the application of system. Attacks on the Bahá'í community by the State focussed on its institutional life and only incidentally on its individual members. Motivated by a determination to subordinate all other loyalties to allegiance to his person, Rezá Shah sought to break down the integrity of the Bahá'í community and harness the energies of its most capable members to the purposes of the State, through a program of discriminatory legislation, the judicious use of physical violence and economic exploitation, and the manipulation of the Shí'ih clergy's bigotry. The effect was to reawaken and institutionalize the anti-Bahá'í prejudice which had weakened with the passing of eight decades since the upheavals of the 1850s. While the full structure of a totalitarian regime did not take shape until much later, several of the elements had already emerged during Rezá Shah's period, and the Bahá'í community gradually became aware of the threat to its welfare which this systematization of persecution represented.

Muhammad Rezá Shah Installed

WITH THE OUTBREAK of World War II in 1939, the possibility of relief for the Bahá'í community came from an unexpected

58. For a discussion of this period, see N.R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, chapters 3 and 4. Keddie distinguishes the Bahá'ís, who "eschewed direct political activity" and "declared their neutrality," from the small Azali sect of the former Bábí Faith, members of which took an active role in the constitutional revolution of 1905-1911.

series of events. The British and Russian governments saw Iran as a vital "back door" route through which British supplies could reach the battered Soviet forces. When Rezá Shah refused to cooperate in this plan and when his well-known Nazi sympathies appeared to pose a threat to British control over the Near East, the two nations acted swiftly to resolve the problem. Russian troops entered Ázerbáiján from the north to seize the vital rail communications, while their British allies moved into southern Iran, deposed Rezá Shah, and sent him into exile. In his place, the British installed his twenty-one year old son, Muhammad Rezá Shah, who was expected by all concerned to serve as a compliant puppet.⁵⁹

These developments once again created the impression that the country was entering a new era of social freedom. Political parties were set up, and power shifted from the throne to the Majlis or parliament. The Bahá'ís began to hope that the restrictions on their community might also, in time, be lifted. The political resurgence of the Shí'ih clergy quickly disabused them of this notion. No group took more enthusiastic advantage of the new order than did the 'ulamá. Although, for the most part, they did not assume government posts or involve themselves in party membership, prominent mujtahids became the ideological leaders of much of the political development which took place. This was entirely natural, given the theory developed by Shí'ih Islam that all political authority belongs to the Hidden Imám. Since worldly authority is merely a trusteeship and necessarily imperfect, the Shí'ih theoreticians who had led the Constitutionalist movement called for the creation of a Majlis, or general assembly, to limit the power of the ruler, and to implement principles enunciated in the Qur'án. To make certain that the Majlis, once established, would not stray beyond its limits, Shí'ih scholars were to serve as its guides.⁶⁰

59. Robert Graham provides an interesting analysis of the formative influences on the mind of Muhammad Rezá Shah in his book *Iran: The Illusion of Power*, pp. 57-72.

60. For a discussion of this subject, see Hamid Algar,

Responding to clerical influence, the State began retreating from the restrictive policies of the ousted Rezá Shah. The ban on publicly-held passion plays was repealed; the use of the veil in the city streets was again permitted and even encouraged; public officials who had been identified with secular attitudes were demoted; various prohibitions associated with Ramadan and other Muslim holy periods were applied in government offices; and official sanction was again given for Iranian Muslims to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. The importance of the clergy's political influence was demonstrated in the events related to both the rise to power of Muhammad Mossádeq in 1951 and his overthrow two years later. Ayatollah Káshání, who had secured election as Speaker of the Majlis, played a leading part in both developments.⁶¹

Accordingly, when Muhammad Rezá Shah recovered his throne after a brief period of exile in 1953, he sought another of the accommodations with the clergy which had intermittently been important to the stability of earlier reigns. The nature of this unwritten agreement has been described by a number of scholars.⁶² Essentially, it involved a willingness on the part of the ecclesiastical establishment to leave political matters in the hands of the State, in return for concessions by the latter in fields which were of particular importance to the clergy.

The press began to give wide publicity to the activities of the leading mujtahids; the government agreed to ban the manufacture and sale of alcohol (largely a *pro forma* submission in Iran); and the Shah himself took every opportunity to make an ostentatious display of his religious orthodoxy. But the area in which, once again, State and 'ulamá found it easiest to make a common cause was the treatment of the Bahá'í

"Iran," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, pp. 163-67.

61. The Mossádeq period and the events related to the restoration of the Pahlavi regime have been examined by a number of writers. See, for example, Keddie, pp. 113-41, Graham, pp. 67-72, and Rubin, *The American Experience and Iran*, pp. 54-90. Kermit Roosevelt, who coordinated the overthrow of the Mossádeq regime, has provided an interesting personal memoir: *Countercoup*.

62. Akhavi, see n. 63.

57. For the full text of the report, see *Bahá'í World*, vol. 6, 1934-1936, pp. 94-108.

community. Shahrugh Akhavi, in *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*,⁶³ speculates that "some elements in the ulema were feeling a newly-acquired self-confidence and therefore 'wanted to make a horse deal' between themselves and the Shah."⁶⁴ For its part, the government was in urgent need of an issue which would distract attention from two vital but highly vulnerable projects: the compensation of the shareholders of Anglo-Iranian Oil, nationalized by Muhammad Mossádeq, and the Iranian government's decision to join the Baghdad Pact. Large segments of the public regarded both projects as further illustrations of Iran's domination by Western powers, and the regime would have been particularly vulnerable had the clergy decided to orchestrate a general outcry.⁶⁵

The New Pahlavi Shah and the Bahá'ís

IN SUCH A SITUATION, the Bahá'ís were an irresistible target. During the month of Ramadan 1955, a leading Shí'ih preacher, Sheikh Muhammad Taqí Falsafí, began a series of incendiary sermons in a Tehran mosque, calling for the suppression of the Bahá'í Faith as a "false religion" dangerous to the welfare of the nation.⁶⁶ The government signalled its approval by putting both the national and army radio stations at the Sheikh's service, thus disseminating his attacks throughout Iran. When the Bahá'í delegates gathered on 21 April for their national convention in Tehran, the situation throughout the country had become extremely volatile. The spark was provided by the government's decision to seize the national headquarters of the Bahá'í community and to undertake the destruction of its impressive dome. Minister of the Interior Batmangelich and General Timur Bakhtiár, later head of SAVAK, joined representatives of the clergy in personally participating in this act of

63. Akhavi, pp. 76-90.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

65. *Idem.*

66. Falsafí, an active supporter of the Pahlavi regime, is now prominent in the ruling circles of the Islamic Republic (Farhang, *Nation*, n. 129).

vandalism.⁶⁷ At the same time, the government announced that it had ordered the suppression of all activities by "the Bahá'í sect." At once, a wave of anti-Bahá'í violence swept the country: murders, rapes, and robberies were reported in many areas. The house of the Báb in Shíráz, the foremost Bahá'í shrine in Iran, was pillaged and severely damaged, Bahá'í cemeteries were seized and handed over to mobs for desecration, and corpses were dragged through the streets and burned in public.

In response to the government's initiatives, the Ayatollah Behbeháni, second-ranking figure in the hierarchy, heaped praise on the Shah, calling the Iranian army "the Army of Islam" and assuring the authorities that the anniversary of the attacks on the Bahá'í National Centre would henceforth be observed as a religious holiday.⁶⁸ The most powerful cleric in the country, Ayatollah Burujirdí, who had initiated the pogrom, published an open letter of thanks to Mullah Falsafí for his service both to Islam and to the monarchy. The letter described the Bahá'í Faith as a conspiracy which endangered the State as well as the national religion, and called for a general purge of Bahá'ís from all positions in public service.

Once again, however, the alliance ran aground on the reef of political realities. Iran had become an integral part of an interlocking global system of economic and political relationships. In response to a summons from the head of their faith, Bahá'í communities around the world vigorously protested the regime's support for the persecution. In this, they were joined by leading organs of the international press.⁶⁹ The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, and the United States State Department brought pressure on the Iranian government to call a halt to the attacks. Dependent as it was on

67. Falsafí was invited as guest of honour at the event.

68. Akhavi, pp. 77-78.

69. When the regime discovered the extent of the protest aroused in the West they denied that army officers had participated. An unsuccessful attempt was made to suppress the series of photographs which had been taken of the destruction of the Bahá'í National Centre's dome.

foreign support and approval, the regime was in no position to resist this pressure, regardless of the domestic political price which surrender would entail.

Akhavi's study of the resulting confrontation between the spokesmen of the Shah and the representatives of the clerical establishment provides a helpful view of the forces which were at work in the crisis. The clergy pressed for a formal piece of legislation which would declare the Bahá'í Faith illegal, would make service to the faith a criminal offense, and would establish appropriate penalties: prison terms for anyone found guilty of Bahá'í membership, the sequestration of all Bahá'í properties and the disbursement of the proceeds for the use of Islamic propaganda agencies, the discharge of all Bahá'ís from public service, and the prohibition of any form of Bahá'í religious activity. The clergy's spokesmen in the Majlis found themselves facing an embarrassed cabinet which, while assuring them that every means would be taken "within the law" to protect Islam, stubbornly refused to introduce the legislation which would have accomplished the 'ulamá's objectives. Nor would the government even pronounce its official attitude towards the Bahá'í Faith. The regime was reduced to engaging in a debate in the Majlis on the subject of the Bahá'í community, in which the government apologists appear to have been forbidden to mention the word Bahá'í.⁷⁰

A Quasi-Totalitarian Regime

ONLY A SUPERFICIAL OBSERVER would have concluded, however, that the end of the 1955 crisis marked an improvement in the basic position of the Bahá'í community in Iran. In the Bahá'í issue, as in a number of others, the Shah had recognized the weakness of his regime and its vulnerability to pressures from both domestic and foreign sources. His response was to initiate a series of programs aimed at creating in Iran the apparatus of a quasi-totalitarian state. These developments were to have particularly grave

70. Akhavi, pp. 80-87.

consequences for the Bahá'í community.

The main features of the new regime are familiar to students of modern Iranian history.⁷¹ By 1957, the agency known by its initials as SAVAK, the National Information and Security Organization, had been set up as the chief organ of state control. Various agencies of this central body multiplied rapidly, invading every area of public life and finally producing the infamous "Internal Security and Action Branch," which used torture, secret prisons and trials, and a network of informers in its efforts to paralyze all opposition to the regime.⁷² Economic life, too, was to be harnessed to the service of the State. In 1962, the Shah announced the launching of what he called a "White Revolution" which included a land bill involving a major redistribution of the ownership of agricultural lands throughout the country. A simultaneous program of intense industrial development tightly tied the fortunes of the emerging capitalist class to the interests of the State. The State's bureaucracy mushroomed, bringing fundamental areas of culture such as law and education under secular control and creating an enormous demand for trained personnel.⁷³

To provide ideological underpinnings for the new regime, the Shah adopted a historical ideal which he saw as capable of seizing the imagination of the Iranian people and channelling their energies into the service of the State. This ideal was the cultural glory which Persia had known before the coming of the alien and "inferior" influence of the Arabs. The theme can be detected in some of the features of the reign of Rezá Shah, but it became a national credo during the concluding two decades of the rule of his son. All government agencies were mobilized in its service. Efforts were made to purge the Persian language of Arabic corruptions; the great achievements of the ancient Persian dynasties were celebrated; pride in the "Aryan race" became an article of faith in the schools; the

71. See particularly Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, pp. 38-172.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-90.

73. James Alban Bill has provided a sociological analysis of the effects of this development. *The Politics of Iran*.

Iranian calendar, which Rezá Shah had based on the solar year, was shifted again to begin with the coronation of Cyrus the Great in 558 B.C., with the odd result that Iranians went to sleep one night in the year A.H. 1355 and awoke the next morning in the year 2535.

In short, the regime appeared bent on trying to resolve the problem presented by the adherence of 95 percent of its subjects to Islam, by ignoring Islam. Faith was relegated to those areas which were considered of little or no importance to the "Great Civilization" which the Shah envisioned, areas where it could be expected gradually to atrophy through neglect. This vast program culminated with the celebration in 1972 among the ruins of Persepolis, of the twenty-five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Iranian monarchy.

The program excited a rage of opposition among many of the fundamentalist clergy, who saw the new society as literally "Satanic." They were joined in this sentiment by the younger and radicalized group of Shí'ih Muslim thinkers who were convinced that modern technology could be assimilated to a basically Islamic intellectual and political structure. Only the Shah's autocracy, and the foreign patrons who were perceived as its supporters, stood in the way of this fulfillment of Islam's historic mission.⁷⁴

Campaign to Suppress the Bahá'í Faith

WHAT OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY during this period? The events of 1955 were a continuing reminder to the regime of the need to avoid a level of anti-Bahá'í violence which might attract renewed international disapproval. There were, however, new factors which deepened antipathy towards the Bahá'ís on the part of the political establishment. The Shah himself, who has been suspected of clinical megalomania by more than one observer,⁷⁵ shared his father's resentment of the ways in which the religious

beliefs of certain of his Bahá'í subjects impinged on their relationship to him.⁷⁶ More important, Bahá'í teachings represented a potential intellectual rallying point for the growing Iranian intelligentsia, which was independent of the Pahlavi myth. In the mid-1960s, for example, James Alban Bill, concluded that:

The Iranian intelligentsia has very decidedly discarded old values and value systems. Indeed, one result of this has been an intellectual wandering in continuous search of a new framework. . . . It is perhaps natural that the secularization of the educational process would result in a different view of Shí'ih Islam. The result has been a sharp move away from this most basic of value systems which organized all phases of a Muslim's life. . . . In the move away from Islam, large numbers of the intelligentsia have embraced Baha'ism, a religion that demands great commitment, but at the same time claims progressive and liberal goals.⁷⁷

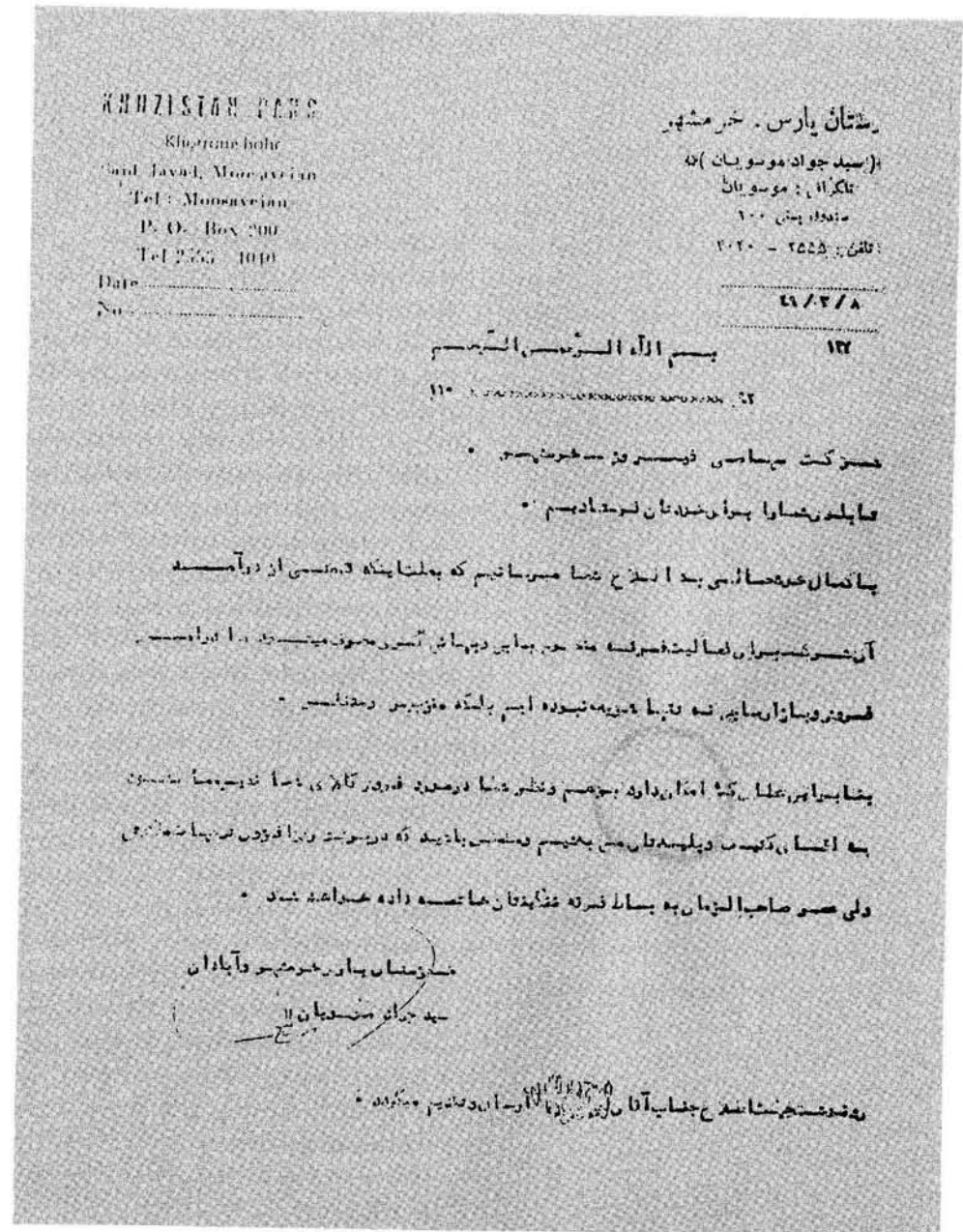
The pressure on the Bahá'í community increased greatly in 1965 with the appointment of Amir Abbás Hoveidá as Prime Minister. Although nominally a Muslim, Hoveidá was a secular-minded politician who was accused by his political rivals of using an ostentatious devotion to Islam to advance his career. He had, however, an Achilles heel. His paternal grandfather had been a member of the Bahá'í Faith, and Hoveidá's father had returned to Islam and raised his own children in that religion only after being expelled from the Bahá'í community for persistent involvement in political activities. The Prime

76. Because visits by Persian Bahá'ís to the United States were being misrepresented by Islamic fanatics, the Guardian of the faith requested that these not take place. Accordingly, when it became necessary for the Shah's personal physician to accompany the ruler on a state visit, it was necessary for him first to secure the approval of the Guardian, as the doctor was a member of the faith. The permission was readily accorded. Since the individual concerned was in the army medical corps, the request from the Shah had the character of an official order; the Guardian pointed out that submission to it represented no more than an act of civil obedience. The implication was not, however, lost on the monarch.

77. Bill, p. 61.

74. See Keddie, pp. 183-230.

75. See for example Bakhtiár, p. 93, and Heikal, p. 16.



Letter from Khuzistan Pars during the reign of Muhammad Rezá Pahlavi (May 29, 1970) to the Firuz Company of Khorramshahr, cancelling contracts because of the latter's association with "the ugly Babi and Bahá'í sect" and refusing "to deal with your dirty and defiled selves."

Minister's political enemies sought to use this family history to attempt to discredit Hoveidá by attaching the all-purpose "Bábí" tag to his name. Accordingly, he appears to have felt impelled to be particularly severe in his treatment of Bahá'ís.⁷⁸ The twelve years of his ministry saw a series of discriminatory regulations against Bahá'ís adopted by the government and enforced by SAVAK: a new Civil Service Code required applicants for government jobs to state their religion, and attendant regulations made it clear that candidates could be accepted only if they professed one of the recognized faiths and did not hold "opinions" which were out of harmony with the traditions of the country. Acting on these directives, government departments, crown corporations, and even private industries which relied heavily on government orders discharged their Bahá'í employees. At the same time, orders were given to erase from the history books all events associated with the Bahá'í Faith. In the United Nations, the regime's spokesman, Mrs. Teimourásh, denied to her startled audience that the Bahá'í community any longer existed in Iran.⁷⁹

Once again, after a brief period of hope inspired by the United Nations' intervention in the mid-1950s, the Bahá'í community sank back to its existence as the scapegoat of the Iranian social order. During the 1960s, employment outside private industry was a serious problem for many Bahá'ís and depended always on the ability of a Muslim superior to demonstrate that no other applicant possessed the particular talents or technical knowledge required by the position. Always, the application of law or regulation was left to the caprice of individual chiefs of police, heads of government departments, and local and provincial functionaries. On occasion, as hap-

78. It seems significant that Hoveidá's brother, Fereydoun Hoveidá, formerly the Shah's representative at the United Nations, makes no reference to the family's Bahá'í antecedents (or indeed to the existence of the Bahá'í Faith or community) in his recent book, *The Fall of the Shah*. The book is essentially an attack on the author's former master and an apology for his brother's political career.

79. Fischer, p. 187. (See illustrations previous and facing pages.)

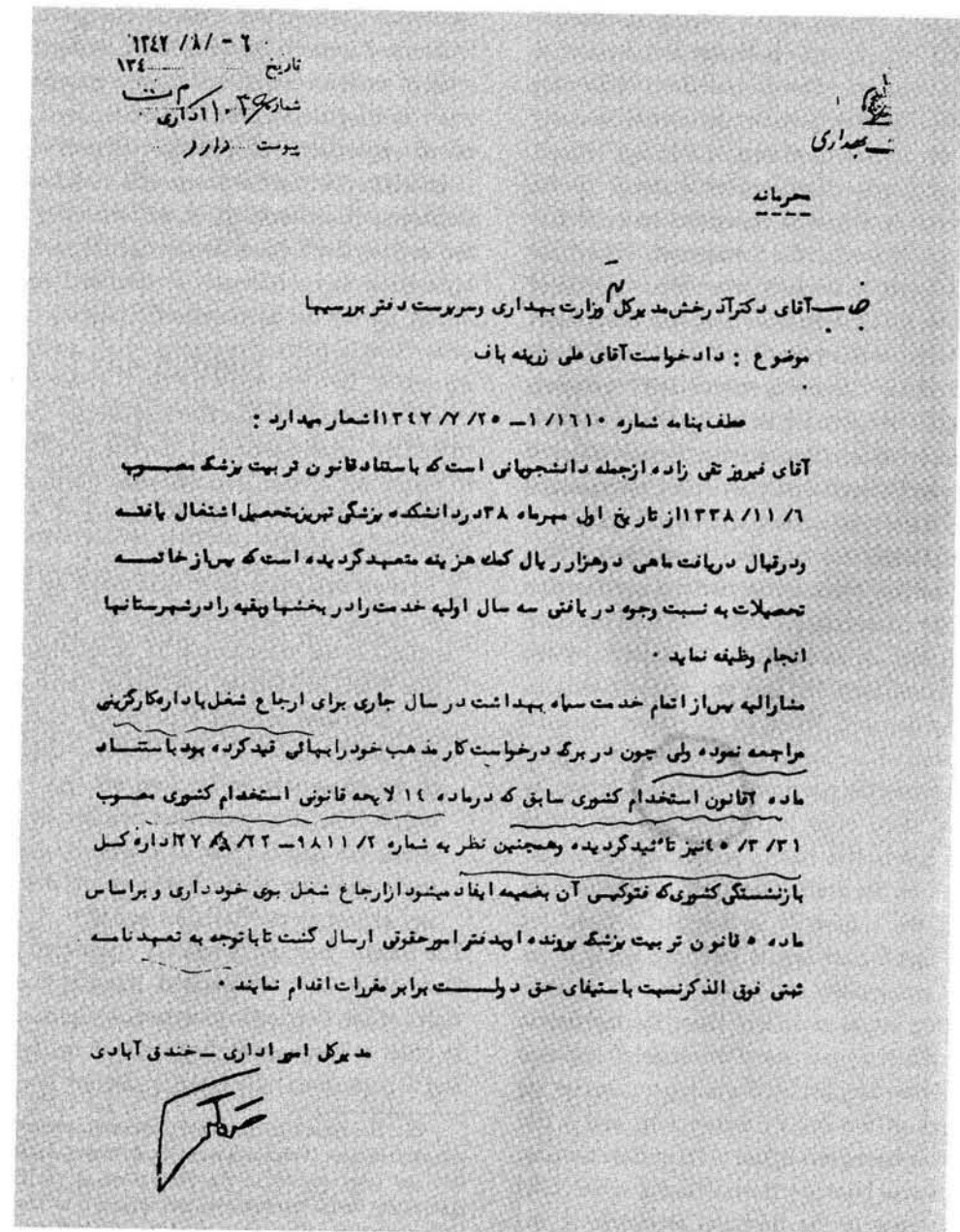
pened in 1963 following antigovernment riots in several regions of the country, the authorities turned a blind eye to violent attacks on Bahá'ís and the destruction of their property during the Muslim months of Muharram and Ramadan.

Economic Pressure

IN THE 1970s, as the regime consolidated its position, and particularly as the creation of the OPEC monopoly reinforced its leverage in foreign affairs, minority elements of all kinds came under steadily increasing pressure. Several new factors made the Bahá'í community a particularly attractive target. The first of these was related to the advantage the community had come to enjoy in consequence of its response to the Bahá'í teaching on the importance of education, particularly education in the sciences. As early as the 1950s, Bahá'ís were becoming prominent in the self-employed professions. As the Shah's ambitious modernization campaign gained momentum and the need for trained resources became acute, it was obvious that one of the few pools of qualified personnel in Iran was the Bahá'í minority. Accordingly, exceptions to the rule excluding Bahá'ís from government employment multiplied. Such prominence, together with the economic prosperity which tended to accompany it, particularly in a socio-economic milieu like that of Iran, exposed the Bahá'í community to the clergy's charges that its members were a "favoured élite" who benefitted not through their own efforts, but because of undisclosed advantages they enjoyed.⁸⁰ Much the same charges were made against Iran's Jewish minority.

A related problem was the success of the Bahá'í community itself in gradually increasing its ownership of properties necessary to its various programs. Holy places associated with the lives of the founders of the faith, the sites of many of the great events of Bábí history, cemeteries,

80. The 'ulamá were, of course, aware of the falsity of these charges since they had themselves instigated the regime's discriminatory legislation and closely monitored enforcement.



Letter from Ministry of Health under Muhammad Rezā Shah (October 28, 1968) to department heads of the Ministry, explaining that a graduate medical student, Firouz Taghizadeh, who had completed his education and his service in the health corps, is refused the medical position to which he is entitled because he has indicated his religion as Bahá'í. The letter quotes "Article 2 of the Civil Employment Act, confirmed in Article 14 of the Bill on Civil Employment" as the authority for this action.

and administrative offices were painstakingly acquired by individual believers and donated to the community. Donations and charitable bequests also made possible the establishment of hospitals, clinics, orphanages, old age homes, and community centres. Handicapped by the refusal of civil law to recognize its collective existence, however, the community could not hold property in its own name. For a period of time, many of the endowments had been registered in the name of the Guardian of the Faith, as an individual.⁸¹ After his death in 1957, however, these titles were transferred to the Umaná Corporation, a company created under the provisions of Iranian and Islamic law, with directors appointed by the Bahá'í national assembly.

These successes and the community's efforts to consolidate them in law became a vulnerable target for extortion. An initial tax of 28 million túmáns was collected from the Bahá'ís by the Hoveidá ministry, but this proved to be only an opening demand. When an arbitration commission, from whose judgement there was no appeal, ruled against the government's attempt to impose the tax twice over, legislation was introduced with a retroactive clause permitting the judgement to be set aside. During the parliamentary debate, the ministry's spokesman assured the Majlis that the law would be applied only to the Bahá'í community and represented no threat to any other group in society. Once the legislation was in place, a government commission imposed a supplementary tax of 50 million túmáns on the holdings of the Bahá'í community, and a few days later raised this figure to 80 million túmáns. Neither sum bore any relation to the value of the property nor to the financial resources of the hapless community. Raising this vast ransom involved sacrifice on the part of Bahá'ís throughout the entire country, but even so, only a part could be put together. The regime thereupon fixed an interest-bearing bill of exchange for the remainder, and the community found itself sad-

81. Shoghi Effendi Rabbáni, great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, served as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and interpreter of its teachings from his appointment in 1921 until his death in 1957.

dled with a staggering financial burden for the indefinite future.⁸² The parallels with the treatment of the Jews in medieval Europe are nowhere more striking than in the Pahlavi regime's economic exploitation of its Bahá'í subjects.

In 1975, a further development added to the deepening isolation of the Bahá'í minority from the rest of the nation. Deciding that political opposition was sufficiently divided and demoralized, the regime announced the formation of a new single-party system, the so-called *Rastákhíz*, or "Resurgence Party." Government spokesmen made it clear that any subject invited to join the organization and refusing would have to justify his refusal, and that such justification would be subject to review by the courts. In the Shah's own words:

We must straighten out Iranian ranks. To do so, we divide them into two categories: those who believe in the monarchy, the Constitution, and (the White Revolution); and those who do not. . . . Everyone must be man enough to clarify his position in this country. He either approves of the conditions or he does not. As I said before, if his disapproval has treacherous overtones, his fate is clear. *If it has ideological roots*, he is free in Iran, but he should not have any expectations.⁸³ (Italics added.)

The Bahá'í community quickly discovered what these ominous words implied. Iranians from all walks of life, flocked to join the new organization in order to continue to play a role in the system and to participate fully in the apparently limitless

82. The Bahá'í International Community prepared an extensive dossier of photocopies of the documents related to this and other aspects of the persecution of the Bahá'í community under the Pahlavis, and offered it to Mansour Farhang, then the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, in a letter dated July 7, 1980. A complete set of these documents, both photostats of the originals and English translations, was subsequently sent by the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to Mr. Alí Ághá, then Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United States. The documents are available for study by qualified scholars at the library of the Bahá'í International Community, Suite 444, 866 UN Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA.

83. Muhammad Rezá Pahlavi, in a speech of March 2, 1975, published by the Ministry of Information and Tourism, and cited by Halliday, p. 48.

economic boom which the country was enjoying.⁸⁴ Alone among the population, the Bahá'í community wrote formally to the Shah to indicate that, while he could be assured of their loyalty, Bahá'ís would have to decline to join the *Rastákhíz* on the grounds of their religious belief which prohibited participation in political activities.⁸⁵ The isolation of the Bahá'ís thus became complete.

Fall of the Pahlavi Regime

IT IS NOT SURPRISING, therefore, that when the marches and protests began in 1978, the singling out of the Bahá'í community as a scapegoat was one of the regime's immediate responses. Throughout that summer, SAVAK organized a number of incidents aimed at driving a wedge between the more radical elements of the Shí'ih clergy and the main body of the 'ulamá. The horrifying burning of the Rex Cinema in Ábádán, which the regime attributed to Islamic fundamentalists, may have been one of these attempts.

Recent disclosures by former SAVAK officers have also shown how "government agents provoked anti-Bahá'í hysteria to divert reactionary Muslims from turning their fury against the Shah."⁸⁶ SAVAK agents organized a riot in which some three hundred homes owned by Bahá'ís were burned. A mob attack on the house of the Báb was then incited. To the surprise of SAVAK, familiar with the local clergy's hatred of the Bahá'í heresy, mullahs came into the street to stop the riots before the shrine had been destroyed. The excuse given to the faithful was that the building had once belonged to a siyyid, i.e., the Báb had been a lineal descendant of Muhammad. This respite, however, was short-lived. By December, public protest had turned into revolution, the clergy were united in their opposition to the regime, and a number of Bahá'ís in Shíráz were killed with impunity during the course of attacks incited by the mullahs themselves.⁸⁷

86. *Time* magazine, February 20, 1984, p. 83. The agents in question were the Tablígát-i-Islámí.

87. Fischer states that, when the summer's efforts to create diversions failed, the regime "pandered to the allegation that the Shah relied excessively on Bahá'ís" and dismissed those in prominent positions, including the Shah's physician (Fischer, p. 198).

84. Bakhtiár says that even the members of the Communist Túdeh party felt compelled to join (Bakhtiár, p. 91).

85. The community adopted the same attitude when called upon by the Islamic revolutionary regime to vote on a one-option ballot for the new constitution drafted by the mullahs.

IV. The Islamic Republic, 1979 –

WHEN THE PAHLAVI REGIME finally collapsed in February 1979, the vast majority of Iranians hailed the revolution as the dawn of the long awaited era of political liberty and national reconstruction. Elsewhere in the world, particularly in the West, governments with the foresight to establish ties to the circle of political advisors around Ayatollah Khomeini, reassured themselves about the essentially progressive nature of the revolution and the prospects for satisfactory, if stressful, relations with the new regime.⁸⁸ The press, assiduously cultivated by these same aides, found many encouraging features amid the fundamentalist rhetoric. It was widely accepted that the movement's ideology represented the resurgence of the religion of Islam itself, and scholarly experts began to appear in chancelleries and on television to explain the character of Islamic law and government.⁸⁹

Even the traditional victims of Shí'ih fanaticism had their fears considerably allayed by reassurances from the revolutionary leadership. In the new order religious minorities were to be granted toleration, ethnic groups were to preserve their identities, and women's rights were not only to be protected but also redefined and extended. All hues of the political spectrum, including Marxism, would have their assured place in the system. Jewish delegations called on Khomeini at Neauphle-le-Château, France, as well as on his spokesmen in other major centres. Despite the history of anti-Jewish discrimination in Iran and the special vulnerability of that community because of the revolutionary leadership's

hostility to Israel, the promise of protection was categoric:

I have given a message to the representatives of the Jewish community [of Iran] who came to visit me here . . . I told them that we would even invite all those Jews who have left their country under the influence of propaganda and are now in Israel, to come back to their country and participate in rebuilding it. In Iran, under Islamic rule, they will have all the freedom, religious freedom, they could wish.⁹⁰

Only the Bahá'ís were conspicuously excluded from these assurances. In the same interviews in which the Ayatollah and his spokesmen promised toleration for religious minorities, they explicitly denied any such rights to Iran's largest religious minority. An interview given by Khomeini to Professor James Cockroft of Rutgers University in December 1978 is typical. The following excerpt is taken from Cockroft's transcript of the interviews, the text of which was approved by the Ayatollah and his aide, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdí, and then published in the February 23, 1979 issue of *Seven Days*:⁹¹

Question: "Will there be either religious or political freedom for the Bahá'ís under an Islamic government?"

Answer: "They are a political faction; they are harmful. They will not be accepted."

Question: "How about their freedom of religion — religious practice?"

Answer: "No."

In view of the long history of persecution of Iran's Bahá'í population under both the Qájár

88. See, for example, the summary of the views of American expert observers such as Richard Cottam, Richard Falk, James Bill, and Andrew Young in Ledeen and Lewis, pp. 210-12.

89. Edward W. Said in *Covering Islam* believes that the coverage of "the Iran story" by the Western media was unfair. See, however, Rubin, Appendix.

90. Many of the promises were violated, although the three religious minorities continue to enjoy a limited toleration.

91. See also *New York Times*, February 13, 1979: "Two U.S. Jews hold talk. . . ."

and Pahlavi dynasties, this exclusion of the community was ominous indeed. Bahá'í fears had been intensified by the way in which, during the final months of the Shah's regime, they had been singled out by Shí'ih fanatics in violent attacks on individuals and property. If their historic exclusion from civil protection was to be made even more explicit under the new regime, and particularly if that regime was to be dominated by the ecclesiastical caste responsible for the persecutions under the Qájárs and the Pahlavis, the future was very dark.

The Anjuman-i-Tablghát-i-Islámí

THE MENACE BECAME explicit through the emergence of the Anjuman-i-Tablghát-i-Islámí (Society for Islamic Teaching) as a political power in the new regime. This fundamentalist Muslim group had been organized in the 1950s by a Shí'ih cleric, Sheikh Mahmud Tavallái (who later took the name Halabí), as a means of combatting the Bahá'í heresy.⁹² Commonly referred to by clergy and press as Anjuman-i-Zedde-Bahá'íyyat (Anti-Baha'ism Society), the organization drew its membership from fundamentalist elements among the lower clergy, seminarians, civil servants, elementary school teachers and the like, who were organized into local chapters. Although the Anjuman enjoyed the patronage and financial support of the Shí'ih hierarchy,⁹³ its services were early coopted by the Shah's secret police, SAVAK, as one of several instruments of social control in the Pahlavi state.

A 1982 article in a progovernment Iranian newspaper by Mehdi Tayyeb, a former official of the Anjuman, throws an interesting light on the circumstances which had led Halabí to found his movement:

Along with another theology student named Siyyid Abbás Alaví, he (Halabí) was attracted

92. Halabí, an obscure figure, has deliberately sought to avoid publicity.

93. Principally, Ayatollahs Hakím and Burujirdí. See n. 95.

towards Bahá'ism by a Bahá'í teacher. For nearly six months they studied Bahá'í beliefs. Eventually, Alaví, although a trained theologian, became one of the great teachers of Bahá'ism, writing books in its support. When Halabí, who had also been drawn towards Bahá'ism, saw how his friend accepted the new faith, he began to realize the danger that he himself faced through his association with Alaví. He saw that Bahá'ism might not only influence uneducated lay people, but even infiltrate the theological schools, and that prospect alarmed him greatly. Consequently, he became sensitized towards this issue and started a program of study aimed at opposing Bahá'ism.⁹⁴

Tayyeb also attributed the form of the Anjuman's organization and its nationwide expansion to Halabí's familiarity with the administrative structure of the Bahá'í Faith which he sought to combat:

The religious leadership, which was concerned over the problem of Bahá'í expansion, began praising the work being done by Halabí and gave their support to the Hujjatíyyih Society (the Anjuman-i-Tablghát-i-Islámí). The late Ayatollah Burujirdí, the late Ayatollah Hakím and most of the hierarchy endorsed the Anjuman's activities.⁹⁵ In this way, the Anjuman rapidly expanded. Some of the clergy even gave permission to allocate funds from religious donations to "the share of the Imám," to its activities.⁹⁶ This led to the attraction of growing numbers of people to the Anjuman with the result that it was able to set up branches in various cities and towns, each under the sponsorship of a local mullah. As time passed, the Anjuman emerged in organized form at the national level, as well, and since its purpose was to combat Bahá'ism,

94. The article appeared in the February 14, 1982 issue of *Subh-i-Ázadegán*, Tehran. See also nn. 139-141.

95. Burujirdí and Hakím were leading ecclesiastics with close ties to the court. Hakím, particularly, was regarded as "the Shah's ayatollah."

96. The "share of the Imám" is a fund theoretically held in trust for the Hidden Imám, but actually used at the discretion of the hierarchy for pious purposes.

تجدید نظر

برده‌ها بالا می‌روند و دستهای مشکوک در رادیو افشاء می‌گردد

البته اسلام به اصطلاح اصیل، که قبلاً در زیر دستهای فلسفدانیان شاهنشاهی عمل تعمیم داده شده، و در کارگاههای موش و گریزبازی "عدم دخالت در سیاست" با حمایت ساواک و امیرالیهیم انگلیس پرداخته گردیده و تا روز قبل از ورود امام خمینی به کشور، ایشان را هم خارج از دین تلقی می‌کردیم.

اما از آنجا که ضدیت بی‌مبارکانه با نیروهای صدیق انقلابی (به فرض هم که ایراداتی به آنها وارد باشد)، سرانجامی جز وابستگی و دست نشاندگی و افتادن آگاهانه یا غیر آگاهانه در مسیر خطوط ضد - انقلابی و ضد خلقی ندارد، بالاخره روزی پرده‌ها رسماً نیز کنار رفته و حقایق روشن خواهد شد. منتظر این بار ایادی مشکوک رخنه‌گر در رادیو قدری هم ناشی‌گری کردند، و هنوز طنین سخن پراکنشی‌های ارتجاعی ضد مجاهدین، فرو نرفته بود، که عجزاً به دفاع از گردانندگان انجمن شاهنشاهی فلسفه پرداختند. و ما بر این بار دیگر معلوم شد که سرکوب و نفی مجاهدین، راه برای احیاء و اثبات چه نیروهای هموار می‌گردد. و اینکه، در همین رابطه اطلاعیه‌ی وزارت ارشاد ملی "به حساب یک ارتگان رسمی کشور نیز قابل ترجمه است."

مهری

شماره: ۲۴۱/۱۹۰
تاریخ: ۱۳/۲/۸۲

به: ریاست ساواک
از: اداره کل موج ۲۴۱

ثبت شد

شماره: انجمن تبلیغات اسلامی

سکول انجمن تبلیغات اسلامی در مرکز حضور سازه طی و تبلیغی بسیار می‌تواند تا اندازه‌ای است ساواک در این زمینه مساعدت‌های لازم بعمل آورد. با اعلام خواسته سکول انجمن نیز موافقت است ضمن تماس با مأموران یاد شده در رابطه با تأییدیه‌ی گرفته‌شده احکامات آنها تا به جنبه تحریر و چاپ و امانت باقی بماند.

مهری

ثبت شد

۱۳/۲/۸۲

مهری

و این است نمونه‌ای از فعالیت‌های گذشته‌ی حضراتی که امروز رادیو را به وسیله‌ای برای تبلیغ علیه مجاهدین تبدیل کرده‌اند. دیروز، آر ساواک تقاضای مساعدت می‌کردند و امروز هم در خطوط ساواک قصد دارند بقول خودشان با تزویج اسلام واقعی! انگذارند جوانان کشور فریب مجاهدین خلق را بخورند! با این تفاوت که تا دیروز بر علیه امام خمینی بودند و امروز با ادعای در خط امام بودن، مجاهدین را دافع از طریق رادیو می‌گویند.

(سایر اسناد مربوطه را نیز تدریجاً منتشر خواهیم کرد.)

Document marked "secret" found in the captured files of the Pahlavi secret police, SAVAK, revealing the collaboration of the latter with the Anjuman-i-Tablghát-i-Islámí in harassing the Bahá'í community. SAVAK's Third Bureau instructs regional directors to cooperate with the Anjuman in suppressing Bahá'ís systematically, but warning that such activities must not provoke public disturbance. The document was published by the left-wing revolutionary newspaper, *Mujahid*, June 9, 1980.

which was a secret and well-organized group, this increased the pressure to organize the work of the Anjuman.⁹⁷

Under the aegis of SAVAK, Halabí's organization was granted freedom to carry out vigorous propaganda aimed at preventing Muslim conversion to the Bahá'í Faith and, wherever possible, attempting to coerce Bahá'ís to convert to Islam. The program included publishing abusive literature, disrupting Bahá'í meetings and religious services, and attempting to identify Bahá'ís in public employment and to pressure officials to enforce various discriminatory regulations.⁹⁸ The arrangement provided an outlet for the frustrations of Shí'ih fundamentalists, while giving SAVAK another coercive instrument entirely dependent on its goodwill.

In 1956, 1963, and 1978, when the regime was facing various domestic challenges, SAVAK and the Tablígát-i-Islámí carried out joint attacks on the Bahá'í community as diversions.⁹⁹ Mullah Taqi Falsafí, who had led the 1955 anti-Bahá'í pogrom, was an active leader of the Anjuman. Nevertheless, SAVAK was the senior partner. When attacks by undisciplined elements in the Tablígát-i-Islámí led to formal complaints by the Bahá'í community or threatened to arouse the protests of its foreign sympathizers, SAVAK did not hesitate to deliver up its collaborators to the civil courts for prosecution.

The Hujjatíyyih and the Revolution

IN 1978 WITH THE GRADUAL EXPOSURE of the Shah's impotence in the face of civil disorder, the Tablígát-i-Islámí moved to free itself from SAVAK's tutelage and to find itself a role in the new order of things. The result was a startling

97. *Subh-i-Ázádegán*, February 14, 1982.

98. See illustration previous page.

99. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution occurred, the leaders of the Tablígát-i-Islámí, then prominent figures in the new Islamic power structure, were embarrassed by the publication in the opposition newspaper *Mujáhid* of documents from SAVAK files exposing their close collaboration with the infamous "Third Bureau." (See illustration facing and following pages.)

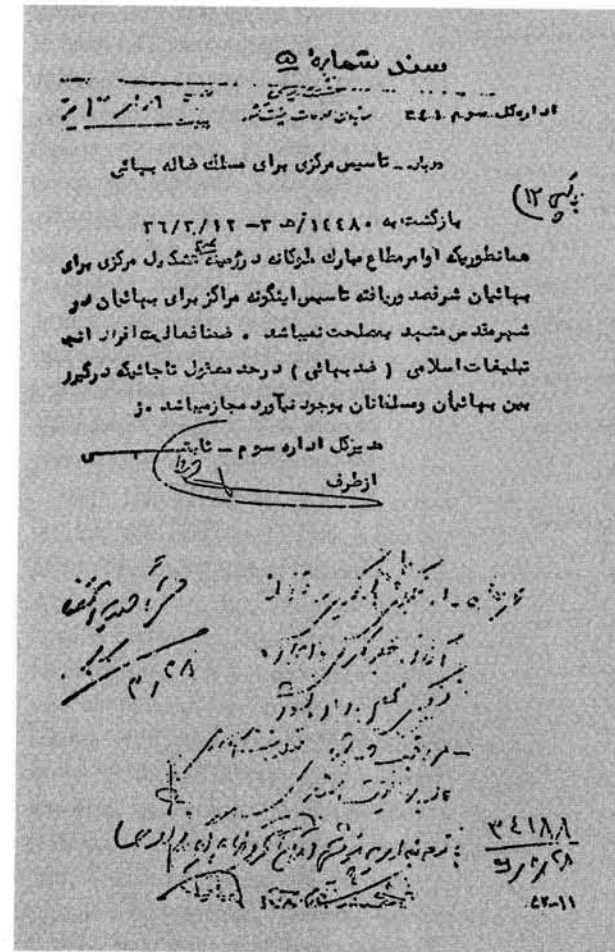
metamorphosis. An organization which had been a tool of the Pahlavi regime's oppressive policies emerged as a power-broker in a people's revolution. Positioning itself on the extreme right wing of the political spectrum and allying itself with powerful ayatollahs, the Anjuman offered the support of its widespread organization in mobilizing conservative Islamic elements in the revolutionary upheaval. In 1978, anti-Bahá'í activities still provided one of the few safe guises behind which clerical opposition to the regime could organize itself. Once the revolution succeeded, the Anjuman began designating itself the Anjuman-i-Hujjat and is now generally referred to by supporters and opponents alike as the Hujjatíyyih.¹⁰⁰

The Hujjatíyyih were able to make this transition with relative ease because of the peculiar political anatomy of the revolutionary movement. As many commentators have since pointed out, the Islamic Revolution was the product of a loose coalition of political forces with little in common except their determination to bring down the Pahlavi regime, and with many fundamental differences of ideology and program.¹⁰¹ To astute observers it seemed obvious that once the short-term objective of the alliance had been attained, these contradictions would emerge and a struggle for power ensue. While there were differences of opinion as to how severe this struggle would be, preparations for a test of strength gathered momentum as the old regime disintegrated.

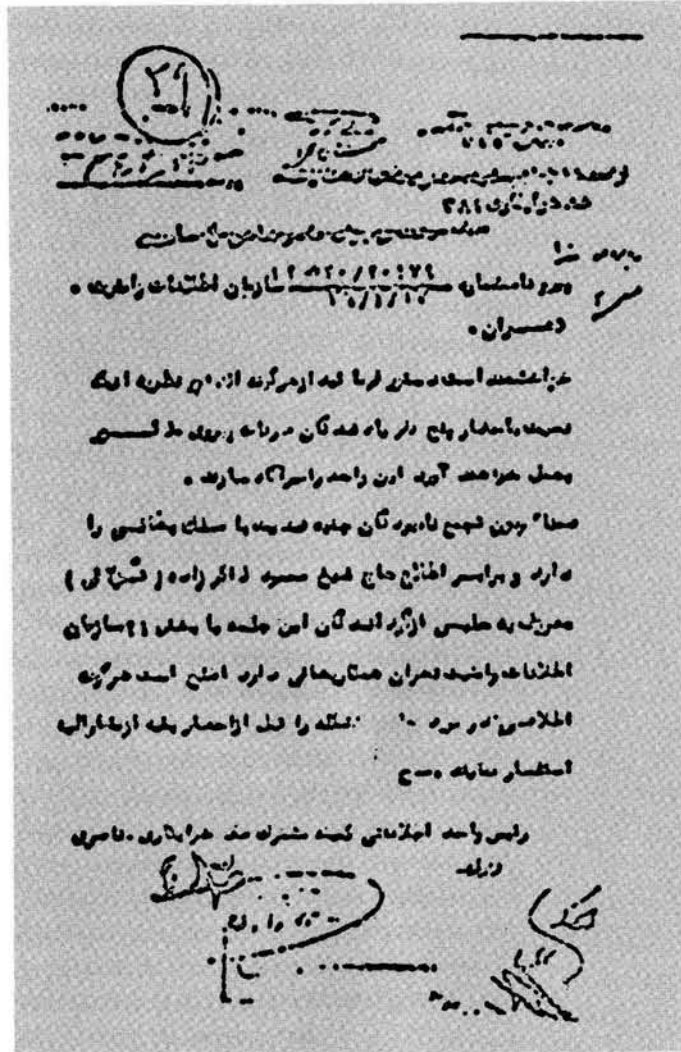
The principal advantage which the Hujjatíyyih enjoyed in this situation was their organization. Apart from them, the most widespread organiza-

100. The name Hujjat (lit., "proof," i.e., of God) is a reference to the expected Shí'ih messiah, the Twelfth or "Hidden" Imám. The choice of the new name for the movement was no doubt intended to underline the Anjuman's central principle, a denial of the Bahá'í claim that the Báb was this promised messenger. It now serves, as well, to emphasize the movement's rejection of claims made by Khomeini's partisans on behalf of their leader, claims which the Hujjatíyyih feel are inconsistent with faithfulness to the expected advent.

101. See Halliday, chapters 4 and 8. Also Keddie, pp. 205-30, 235-39, 257-64.



One of a series of documents from SAVAK files representing discussions between government departments on the degree of freedom to be given to the Tablígát-i-Islámí (i.e., the Hujjatíyyih) in harassing Bahá'ís. The document illustrated is a memorandum to the Minister of Court from Parviz Sabeti, director of SAVAK's Third Bureau, approving Tablígát-i-Islámí activities against the Bahá'í community in Mashad "so long as they do not create public disorder." Ironically, Sabeti is one of those officials of the Shah's regime whom the Islamic regime seeks to portray as Bahá'ís.



Another in the series of captured SAVAK documents. The head of SAVAK, General Nematollah Nassiri is inquiring about the arrest of five persons by a divisional office. The detainees claim to be members of the Hujjatíyyih, and Nassiri orders the division to consult with Sheikh Mahmoud Halabí before taking any action, since the Sheikh is the head of the Hujjatíyyih and “is collaborating closely with SAVAK’s 21st Division in Tehran.” (See also previous document.)

tions in the revolutionary movement were all leftist in orientation: the Mujáhedín-i-Khalq (Islamic Marxists), the Fadá'iyán-i-Khalq (a secular Marxist group to the left of the Mujáhedín), and the Túdeh (the Iranian Communist party).¹⁰² In circumstances so unpredictable, the ecclesiastical leadership could not afford to allow an unsavoury history to bar the Hujjatíyyih from an influential role in the new order. Overnight, individuals whom one might have expected to see join their former SAVAK patrons before revolutionary firing squads emerged instead as members of the *komítehs*, the local Islamic groups who were meting out this rough justice.

With Iran in the hands of the revolutionary regime, the Hujjatíyyih took a leading role in attempting to rid Iran of the Bahá'í heresy. They were joined in this undertaking by a much smaller right-wing organization which had just been reborn, the notorious Fadá'iyán-i-Islám, representative of the “know-nothing” tradition in Islamic political history.¹⁰³ Violently suppressed in the 1950s by SAVAK, after a long history of terrorism and political assassination, the group reappeared as the revolution gathered momentum. The initial energy for the renaissance was supplied by criminal elements who appear to have taken advantage of the disorders of late 1978 to arm themselves and to put their services at the disposal of fundamentalist mullahs in the revolu-

tionary underground. The leaders of the Fadá'iyán, who were rumoured to include Sádeq Khalkháli himself, imposed discipline as the Islamic regime consolidated itself, but the Fadá'iyán remained an unpredictable and violent element in the new republic.

Joining with ecclesiastical allies in the capital and with rural clergy in many areas of the country, the Hujjatíyyih and the Fadá'iyán-i-Islám formed a loose political alliance. In this new role they secured key positions in the Revolutionary Council and in other organs of the new regime. The first step in the campaign they launched against the Bahá'ís was to complete the seizure of the community's records, an initiative which the Hujjatíyyih had begun under SAVAK's protection during the closing months of the Shah's regime. Squads of Hujjatíyyih gunmen descended on Bahá'í national headquarters in Tehran and on centres in several of the major provincial capitals, seized the buildings, expelled the staff, and undertook an exhaustive study of the files and membership lists.¹⁰⁴

At the same time, a campaign of anti-Bahá'í propaganda began in the form of denunciations from pulpits, articles in the press, handbills, posters, and graffiti. Bahá'ís were denounced as heretics, enemies of Islam, “corrupt on earth,” and as collaborators with the Shah's regime. The effect was to unleash waves of attacks on Bahá'ís and their property throughout the country. Members of the faith were beaten and in several instances killed, many businesses were confiscated or destroyed, hundreds of houses burned, and efforts made to force believers to recant their faith. Prominent clergymen warned that there was no place in Islamic Iran for this heresy which was a danger to the spiritual and moral fibre of society.

102. The Mujáhedín and the Fadá'iyán primarily differ over the essentially religious orientation of the former, but both represented major forces in the revolution, especially among the students (Mujáhedín) and the industrial workers (Fadá'iyán). Halliday dismisses the Túdeh as a weak party whose “servile loyalty” to the Soviet Union, he feels, crippled its long-term hopes for a major role (Halliday, pp. 238-39).

103. Richard W. Cottam briefly discusses the history of this fanatical group in *Nationalism in Iran*. See also Akhavi, pp. 66-74. The temporary partnership of the two groups appears to have involved a certain division of responsibility. Sheikh Halabí and the Hujjatíyyih leaders present themselves as theological experts on the Bahá'í heresy and on the development of polemical methods to counteract it. They have also established what they call a “Research Centre on Baháism,” in Qom. The Fadá'iyán-i-Islám, who are essentially religious hoodlums, serve much the same function as the Brownshirts did in the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. (See illustrations following two pages.)

104. Shortly after the membership lists were seized, Bahá'ís began receiving Hujjatíyyih flyers in the mail, warning them of the consequences of obstinately holding to Bahá'í beliefs. Subsequently, the Hujjatíyyih made a point of using the Bahá'í registration numbers in communications with members of the faith, presumably to demonstrate their command of the community's records.

Mehdi Bázargán and the First Islamic Revolution

ONE FAINT RAY of hope existed. The Shí'ih clergy, despite their power, did not constitute the civil government of Iran. After February 11, 1979, that position was filled by Mehdi Bázargán, who had been appointed Prime Minister by the Ayatollah Khomeini, acting on his assumed authority as head of state, replacing the Shah. Bázargán had been accepted as such by the revolutionary movement and the general public, and had duly formed a cabinet.¹⁰⁵ Because he and his colleagues had been emphatic in their public statements assuring civil rights to all Iranian citizens, regardless of ethnic or religious background, the Bahá'í community turned to them for protection. At first privately, and then formally, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran laid their situation before the government, pointed out the dire threats being made against them, and sought to respond to the allegations which the clergy were making. Among these allegations were:

1. *The Bahá'í community had been political supporters of the previous regime*

To this charge, the Assembly pointed to the public record. The Bahá'í community had been the only segment of Iranian society which had written openly to the Shah in 1976 and explained that, because of their religious principles, they could not take part in the one-party system which he had imposed. Nor had Bahá'ís accepted cabinet or any other political posts under the Pahlavis.

2. *The Bahá'í Faith is anti-Islamic*

The Assembly pointed out that Bahá'ís revere the Prophet Muhammad as a messenger of God, accept the Qur'án as a divine revelation, and regard Islam itself as one of the great civilizing forces in human

105. The cabinet included close associates of Khomeini, such as Ibrahim Yazdí, Deputy Prime Minister and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as prominent figures in the former National Front like Karím Sanjábí. The effect was temporarily to reassure the middle class.

history. That they accord similar recognition to the revelations of the founders of other great religions, including their own, does not make them anti-Islamic.¹⁰⁶

3. *The presence of the international headquarters of the Bahá'í Faith in Haifa, Israel, is evidence that Bahá'ís are agents of Zionism*

The Assembly pointed out that the headquarters of their faith were established in Haifa (and neighbouring 'Akká) over 80 years before the State of Israel came into existence; that the selection of Mount Carmel and the neighbouring region for this purpose is related solely to the fact that the founders of their faith, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, are buried there. (Bahá'u'lláh was taken to the Holy Land in 1868 as a prisoner of two Muslim rulers, the Ottoman sultan and the Persian shah, kept there as a prisoner until his death in 1892, and entombed at Bahjí, in the vicinity of 'Akká.)

4. *The leadership of the Iranian Bahá'í community is engaged in "a conspiracy" with the U.S. and British governments*

The Assembly pointed out that the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith categorically forbid the involvement of its members in any partisan political activity, and make loyalty to government a principle of faith. Although challenged repeatedly to do so, the clergy who made this allegation had been unable to produce a single piece of supporting evidence.

5. *Bahá'ís profited financially from the Pahlavi regime*

On this point, the Iranian National Assembly urged that the government identify any individuals whom it considered to be guilty of improper activities of this kind, and prosecute them in the civil courts, as

106. Unlike Islam, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the validity of the major Far East religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as those faiths mentioned explicitly in the Qur'án.

provided by law. It was unjust to allow such general and unsupported allegations to cast a shadow on the reputation of an entire religious minority.¹⁰⁷

These initiatives received no response from the Bázargán ministry. On the contrary, evidence began to emerge which suggested that the government itself, or elements of it, were prepared to collaborate to a certain extent in the persecution. Bahá'ís in North America were shocked when, during the "MacNeil-Lehrer Report" of February 12, 1980, Dr. Mansour Farhang, the regime's spokesman and later representative at the United Nations, denied that the Iranian Bahá'í community was in any way being mistreated and went on to repeat the charge of the mullahs that Bahá'ís had been torturers for SAVAK, chosen because of their peculiar psychological suitability to the task.¹⁰⁸ That this was not an isolated lapse, but an expression of government policy became apparent when the authorities began a series of seizures of Bahá'í shrines and holy places and excluded members of the faith from

107. As religious minorities in similar situations have had cause to appreciate, the charge of "profiteering" has been a difficult one for the Bahá'ís to counter, principally because the accusers have never been required by the civil authorities to document specific cases. The accused community could and did point out that discriminatory legislation had denied to the great majority of their members many of the opportunities normally associated with such activities. They were also aware, however, of the advantages which superior education had conferred on many of their members and of the construction which fundamentalist Muslims were placing on these advantages and the financial benefits that had accrued during the boom of the 1970s. Their reputation for reliability no doubt played a part in persuading Muhammad Rezá Shah to entrust his personal health to a Bahá'í physician, a fact frequently mentioned by Shí'ih critics. The kafkaesque reasoning of the Islamic leadership holds that Bahá'ís were a "privileged élite," since any of the opportunities they enjoyed were technically unjustified privileges, denied to them under the constitution. The effects of this attitude can still be seen in comments by some Western scholars who had little direct contact with the Iranian Bahá'í community, but who picked up the foregoing attitude from their Muslim associates. The names of one or two particularly egregious examples of Bahá'í millionaires are commonly cited in the absence of any evidence supporting the general accusation.

108. See pp. 57-58, for Farhang's subsequent retraction of these charges.

visiting.¹⁰⁹ The regime's initial explanation to foreign journalists for these expropriations was its desire to protect the buildings from malicious damage.

In May 1979, however, the authorities took over the central financial institution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, the Shirkat-i-Nawnahálán, froze its assets, expelled its staff, and terminated all salaries. They followed this by seizing the Umaná Corporation, the body which held title to all Bahá'í shrines, holy places, and cemeteries. Within days, the Missáqíyyih Hospital, the large Bahá'í charitable institution in Tehran, was seized together with the Bahá'í home for the aged in the capital, and all their Bahá'í patients and residents summarily evicted.¹¹⁰

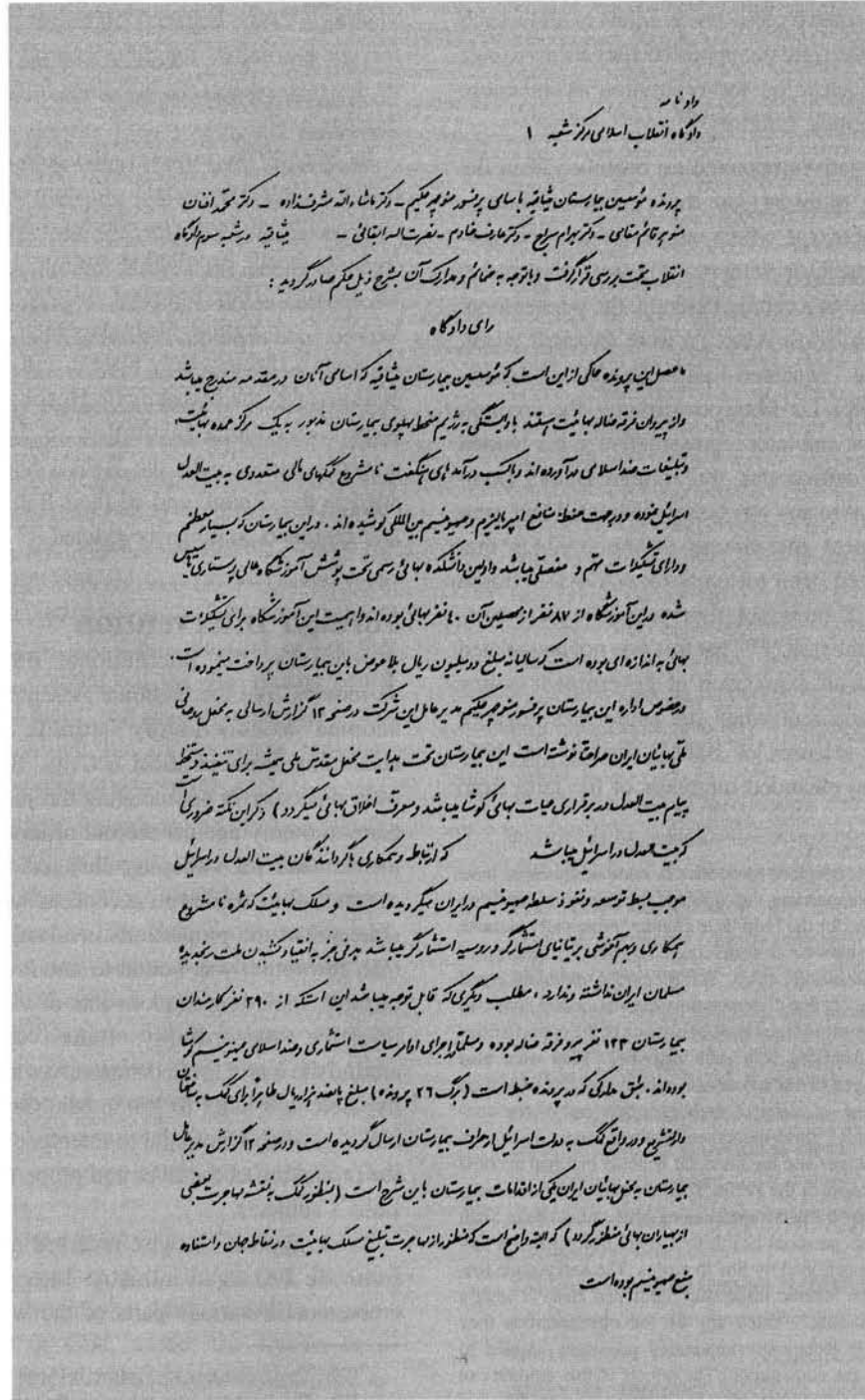
Foreign Intervention

INITIALLY, the international Bahá'í community, like the National Assembly of Iran, adopted a conciliatory attitude. Although abstaining from political activity, Bahá'ís had little difficulty in appreciating the justice of the general outcry against the old order in Iran and the demand for sweeping changes. To varying degrees, they tended to accept, as well, that an upheaval of the proportions involved in the Iranian revolution was bound to entail a period of turmoil, including random acts of violence and injustice. Accordingly, Bahá'í Assemblies around the world limited themselves to appealing by cable and letter to Prime Minister Bázargán and Ayatollah Khomeini to intervene and secure the protection of the lives and properties of their Bahá'í subjects.

These appeals likewise received no response from the Bázargán ministry. Instead, Iranian embassies in various parts of the world began

109. These seizures took place in April 1979.

110. The hospital was subsequently renamed Shahíd Mustaphá Khomeini Hospital, in honour of the Ayatollah's dead son, believed to have been murdered by SAVAK. The judgement of the Central Revolutionary Court, ordering the hospital's confiscation, lists ten reasons justifying this action, each one of which refers explicitly to its Bahá'í character and to no other factor (*The Bahá'ís in Iran*, p. 80). (See illustration following page.)



Extract from verdict of the Islamic Revolutionary Court, Tehran, ordering the confiscation of the Bahá'í Missaghíih Hospital. The charges, which are enumerated, include the Bahá'í membership of the founders, the Bahá'í membership of 40 of the 87 students in the associated school of nursing, the support of the latter school by Bahá'í grants, the Bahá'í membership of 123 of the 290 staff members, and the intention of Bahá'í doctors and nurses to use their training in overseas projects.

issuing statements which denied the reports of persecution and insisted that the Bahá'ís were a political movement supporting the Pahlavi regime.¹¹¹ The Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Yazdí, a close associate of Ayatollah Khomeini, personally endorsed these allegations.

By April 1979, when the new Constitution was being drafted, it was apparent that the persecution of the Bahá'ís was to be institutionalized. In none of the drafts which were prepared and published in the press was there any reference to the Bahá'í Faith, although the Constitution would make such inclusion the sole basis for the granting of civil rights. The other three religious minorities — Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians — were named, even more explicitly than they had been in the Imperial Constitution of 1906, from which the Bahá'ís had also been excluded. Appeals from the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran and other Bahá'í Assemblies around the world, as well as from a wide range of disinterested observers, went unacknowledged. When the new constitution was eventually adopted in December 1979, the Bahá'í community, the largest religious minority in the country and the object of over 130 years of discrimination and persecution, had once again been denied any civil status. Challenged by the Western press on this obvious discrimination and its implications for the safety of nearly half a million people, the government replied through its embassies that:

The Islamic Republic of Iran, having as its official religion Shí'ih Islam, cannot and should not place a misguided group like the Bahá'ís, whose affiliation and association with world Zionism is a clear fact, in the same category as minorities like the Christian, Jews, and Zoroastrians, and recognize them as a religious minority.¹¹²

With the extinguishing of their claim to civil rights, the position of the Iranian Bahá'í community rapidly deteriorated. In March 1979, the house of the Báb, the holiest Bahá'í shrine in Iran, which had been carefully restored after being wrecked in the Shah's 1955 anti-Bahá'í campaign, was turned over by the government to Sádéq Khalkháli specifically "for the activities of the Fadá'iyán-i-Islám."¹¹³ About the same time the authorities gave the former National Centre of the Bahá'í community to the Hujjatíyyih, who sent out flyers announcing its acquisition as their new headquarters.¹¹⁴ Although the centre survived in this new role, the shrine proved too attractive a target for the growing violence of the anti-Bahá'í movement. From September 8 to 11, 1979, a mob led by mullahs and officials of the Department of Religious Affairs, using equipment supplied by the municipality of Shíráz, engaged in wanton destruction. Bahá'í communities around the world once again cabled Prime Minister Bázargán in a desperate attempt to save the building, but the central authorities did not intervene until the shrine had been reduced to rubble on 11 September. Once again, for reasons which are difficult to understand, the government implicated itself further by issuing, through its embassies, state-

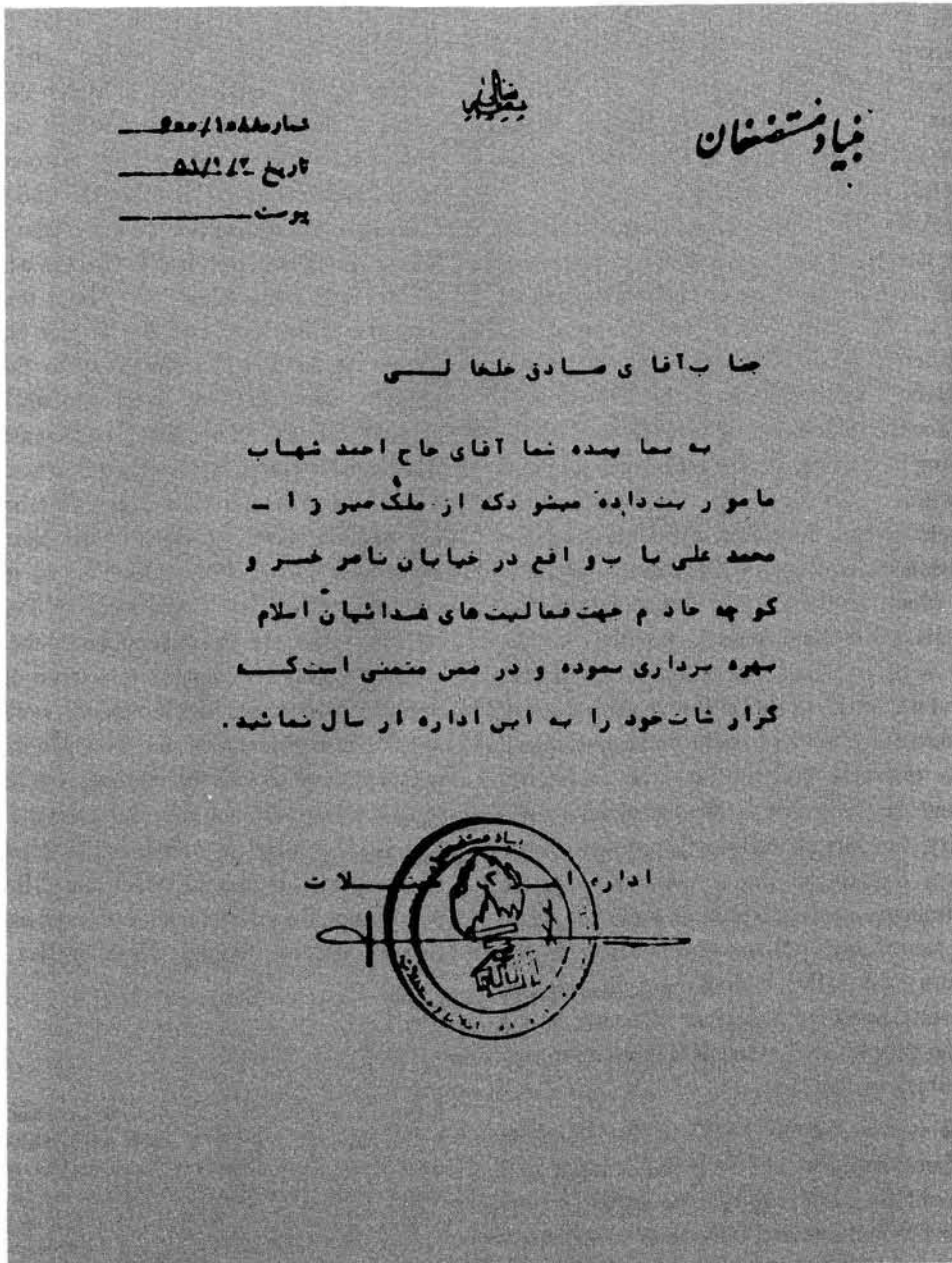
declined to be put off by such statements, spokesmen for the regime outside Iran sought to justify the exclusion of the Bahá'ís from the constitution by explaining that, as a post-Islamic phenomenon, the Bahá'í Faith cannot be "a true religion" but must be a political party. With no apparent awareness of the contradiction involved, the same spokesmen added that Bahá'ís are Muslims who have been "seduced into heresy." As most Iranian Bahá'ís are fourth or fifth generation members of their religion, the latter argument is meaningless.

113. Letter from the Foundation for the Dispossessed, Tehran, addressed to Sheikh Sádéq Khalkháli, dated March 23, 1979, file 655, no. 1088. (See illustration page 44.) An 8 mm film of the destruction was incorporated in Canadian Television's national news-magazine program "W-5" October 1980. Several collections of colour photographs also exist in the West.

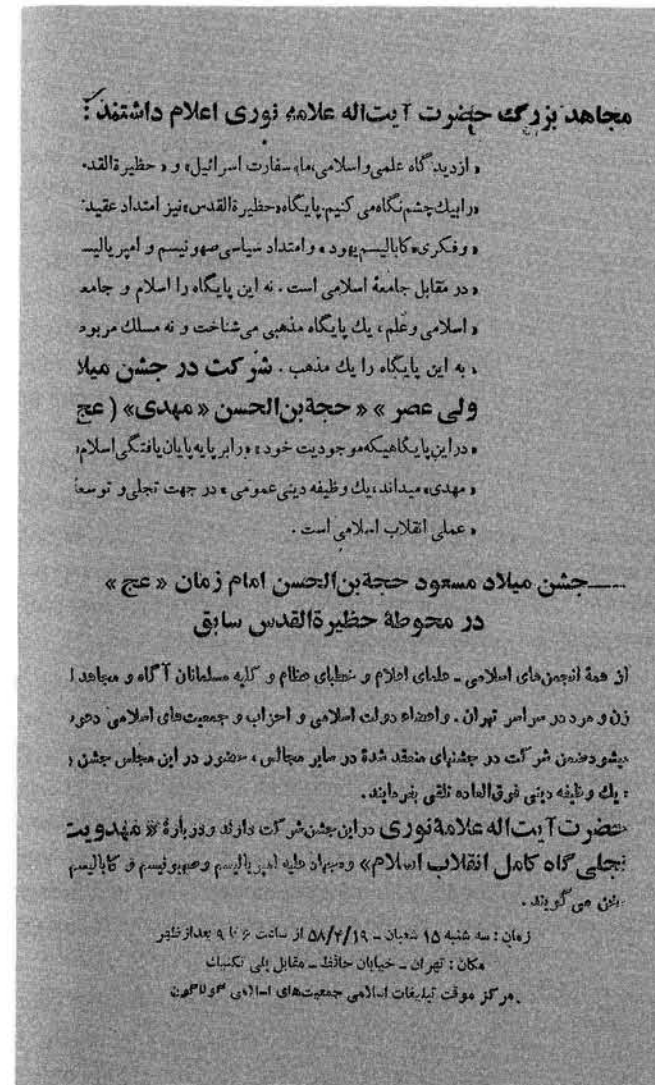
114. The flyer equates the Centre with the "Embassy of Israel." (See illustration page 45.)

111. See, for example, statements of the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires (September 26, 1979), and the Iranian consulate in Manchester, England (September 21, 1979).

112. Statement by the Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran, Buenos Aires, September 26, 1979. When newsmen



Formal letter from the Foundation for the Dispossessed (#655-1088, March 23, 1979) formally transferring ownership of the principal Bahá'í shrine in Iran, the house of the Báb, to Sheikh Sádeq Khalkháli, "for the activities of the Fadá'iyán-i-Islám."



Flyer published by the Anjuman-i-Tablighát-i-Islámí (i.e., the Hujjatíyyih), June 1979, announcing that the former national centre of the Iranian Bahá'í community (which is represented as being "one and the same with the Israeli embassy") has now been taken over as the Tehran headquarters of the Anjuman. To celebrate this acquisition, the public are invited to the former centre on June 10, 1979, to hear an address by the Ayatollah Noori who will expose the relationship between Bahá'ís and Zionism.

ments which sought to justify the desecration.¹¹⁵

By this time, the attacks on the Bahá'í minority were beginning to arouse concern and protest outside the community. On September 12, 1979, the Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland published the text of an independent investigation which it had just completed, and which represented an indictment of what it saw as a coordinated program aimed at harassing the Bahá'í community, destroying its economic foundations, and arousing popular hatred. The report expressed fear for the lives of Iranian Bahá'ís and called on the framers of the constitution to reconsider their exclusion of the Bahá'í minority.¹¹⁶ Like the protests of the Bahá'í community itself, the report was ignored by the Iranian government. Behind the scenes, attempts by sympathetic foreign governments to alleviate the situation were likewise able to do little more than caution the regime that it was under observation; violence which led to a widespread loss of life could provoke an outcry damaging to the efforts of the new Republic to establish itself in the international community.

Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr and the Second Islamic Revolution

IN EARLY NOVEMBER of 1979 the Bázargán ministry collapsed as a result of its inability to protect the United States Embassy or to secure the release of the embassy's personnel.¹¹⁷ On

115. "On September 8, 1979 a group of people in Shíráz . . . in deep sadness and grief for the 5,000 unarmed Iranians who were gunned down by the U.S.-trained army of the deposed Shah, and fully knowledgeable of the activities of the Bahá'ís in the upper echelons of the deposed Shah's regime, suddenly attacked the Báb's house on that commemorative day of mourning." Letter from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Washington, D.C., to Mr. Dell Wells, October 15, 1979.

116. From a copy in the possession of the writer.

117. Bázargán and his cabinet resigned when Khomeini refused to approve the enforcement of their decision to return the embassy to the U.S. government.

118. The list of fourteen names includes seven Shí'ih ecclesiastics during the period February 1979 through August 1980. Messrs. Bani-Sadr, Bázargán, and Ghotbzadeh were among the laymen: *Iran Times*, February 10, 1984.

Khomeini's personal authority the so-called Revolutionary Council temporarily assumed the powers of government, pending the election of a president and parliament.¹¹⁸ As the Council itself included hardline Shí'ih clerics who had been chiefly responsible for the imposition of the new theocratic constitution, the political change meant that several more of the organs of central government fell directly into the hands of persons who were active in the anti-Bahá'í campaign.

One of these was Muhammad Ali Rajá'í, who had been an organizer of the Hujjatíyyih group in the city of Qazvin.¹¹⁹ Appointed Minister of Education by the Revolutionary Council, Rajá'í began a purge of all Bahá'ís in the educational system. In an edict which not only discharged Bahá'í teachers but which also held them responsible for repayment of all salaries they had previously received, the new minister said:

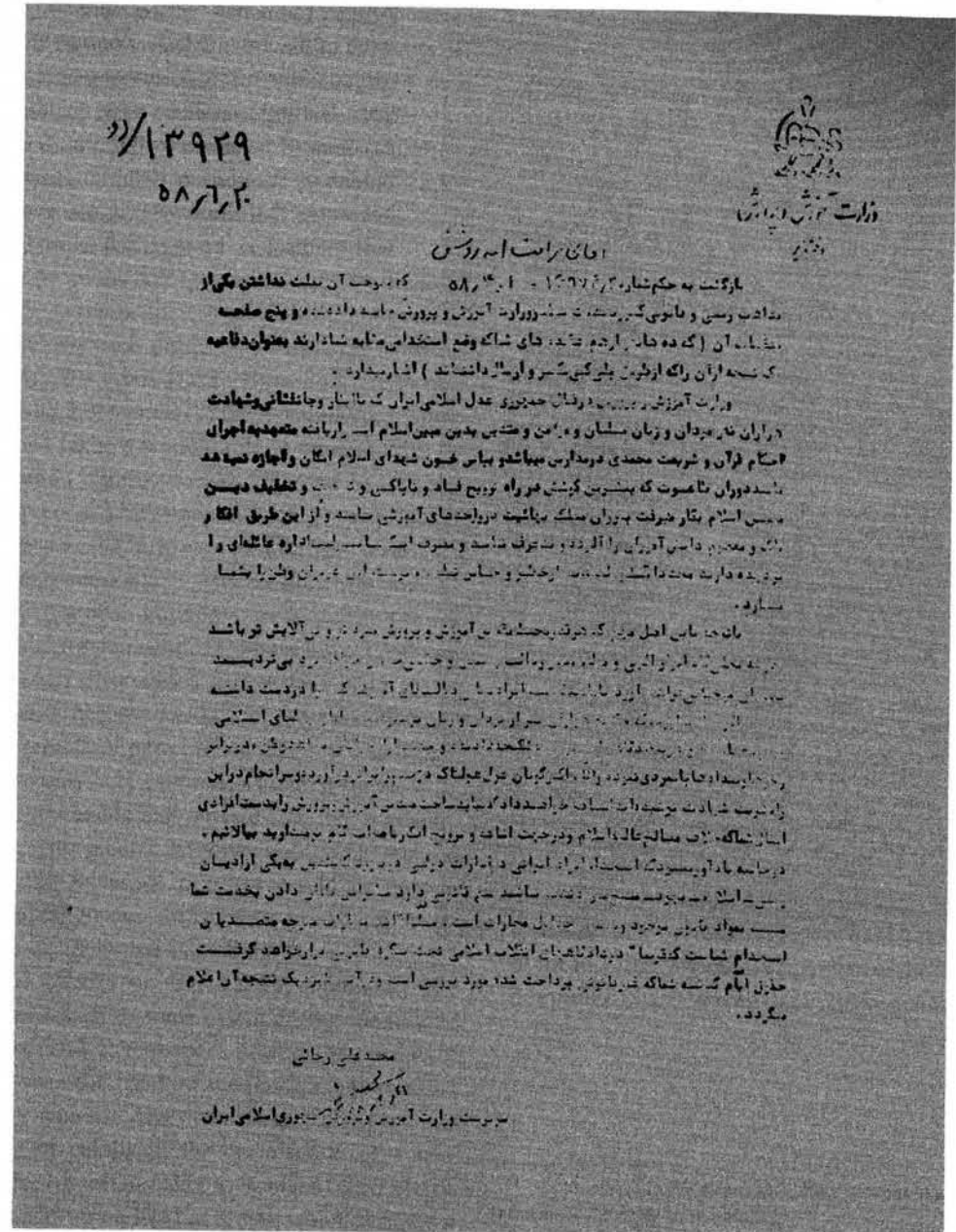
The Ministry of Education, which has come into being only through the justice of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the blood and martyrdom of thousands of Muslims, men and women, cannot tolerate, like the previous regime, the existence of followers of the Bahá'í sect in its Educational unit, and in this way defile and deviate the minds and thoughts of innocent students.¹²⁰

Other government departments followed this lead, dismissing Bahá'í employees, cancelling retirement pensions, and pressuring companies holding government contracts to do the same. The Union of Islamic Committees of Civil Servants was induced to adopt a resolution on June 22, 1980, calling for the expulsion from all government employment of "individuals who do not believe in one of the recognized religions of the country,"¹²¹ mentioned in the Constitution.

119. The meteoric career of Rajá'í, from part-time elementary teacher to Minister of Education, Prime Minister, and eventually President in less than three years, is extraordinary, given his modest abilities. His only qualification for office seems to have been his unquestioning obedience to the dictates of his ecclesiastical patrons.

120. *The Bahá'ís of Irán*, p. 76, includes a photostatic copy of the original as well as an English translation. (See facing page.)

121. *Ibid.*, p. 25.



Circular letter from Muhammad Alí Rajá'í, then Minister of Education, dismissing Bahá'í teachers for "defiling the minds and thoughts of innocent students." The teachers are warned that the revolutionary courts are considering action to recover all salaries paid to them since their employment had been in violation of the constitution.



Article published in the June 30, 1980 issue of the Tehran daily *Jumhuri-í-Islami* (organ of the ruling party) announcing that three leading ayatollahs have declared the payment of pensions to Bahá'ís to be forbidden by the *shariat* [Islamic canon law] but warns that those who ignore the edict will themselves be regarded as offenders.

Prominent ayatollahs issued theological judgments which not only justified the discharge of Bahá'í employees and the cancellation of their pensions, but also threatened uncooperative supervisors with punishment before revolutionary courts.¹²² The media gave wide publication to these actions, representing them as instances of Islamic revolutionary justice.

Hope for the beleaguered community flickered briefly at the beginning of 1980 when the presidential elections produced a surprising landslide victory for Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr. Although Bani-Sadr, a member of the Revolutionary Council, had taken a leading role in undermining the Bázargán regime, he was regarded by Western observers as a rational politician whose principal concern would be to ease tensions and restore the national economy.¹²³ His election was seen by many political observers as a defeat for the Islamic fundamentalists whose own candidate had been disqualified a few days prior to the balloting because he did not meet the electoral requirement of pure Iranian descent. The Bahá'í community was cautiously assured by its sympathizers inside and outside Iran that a government with greater authority and public support than the Bázargán ministry would be able to extend a greater measure of protection to its citizens, including even Bahá'ís.

The attacks on the Bahá'í community did indeed lessen to some extent during the second half of 1980. In retrospect, however, this seems to have been the result of the preoccupation of the clergy with the American hostage crisis and the extended campaign for the election of a new Majlis. An initial ballot took place on 16 March and a run-off on 10 May, during which period the clergy devoted their energies to an attempt to secure a strong majority for their newly-formed Islamic Republican Party.

Executions Begin

IN THIS AIM the party succeeded.¹²⁴ The immediate consequence was to give a much freer hand to the fundamentalists who were pressing for more vigorous steps to purify the Republic from the contamination of infidel ideas. Having already seized the records of the Bahá'í community and begun the systematic seizure of Bahá'í property, both communal and individual,¹²⁵ the clergy moved now to "cut off the head" of the heresy by destroying its leadership.¹²⁶ Influenced, no doubt, by the role which they themselves play in Shí'ih Islam, the mullahs mistakenly believed that the Bahá'í Faith's survival in Iran depended on a limited number of leaders whom they identified as the membership of the appointive or elective institutions of the faith.¹²⁷

It was the conviction of the organizers of the plan that, once this leadership had been destroyed, the Bahá'í community would simply dissolve as the mass of believers succumbed to intensive pressure to recant their faith.¹²⁸ This pressure had already begun in many centres throughout the country where groups of Bahá'ís were dragged into mosques and threatened that, if they did not renounce their beliefs and convert to Islam (i.e., "return to Islam," in the parlance of the mullahs, although 95 percent of the Bahá'í community are fourth and fifth generation

124. The Islamic Republican Party secured nearly two thirds of the seats in the Majlis.

125. This aspect of the campaign appears to have been motivated partly by avarice and partly by a desire to cut off Iranian Bahá'í support for the overseas activities of the faith.


126. One has to remember here that, in the semi-anarchical conditions in revolutionary Iran, groups like the Hujjatíyyih have their own prisons, courts, and companies of revolutionary guards who "cooperate" with the organs of the central government and with other factions, but who are responsible only to the movement's own leadership.

127. The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy.

128. The agents of the Hujjatíyyih, especially, have boasted of this intent in interviews with Iranian Bahá'ís under interrogation.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 77. (See illustration facing page.)

123. A major reason for the extremely positive attitude taken to his election by Western commentators was, of course, the widespread understanding that the resolution of the U.S. Embassy crisis was high on his personal agenda.


 جمهوری اسلامی ایران
 وزارت آموزش و پرورش
 اداره کل آموزش و پرورش تهران
 بسمه تعالی

اداره
 تاریخ
 شماره
 پیوست

لازم است بمسئولان زیر با صداقت کامل پاسخ گوئید.

۱- نام	نام خانوادگی	نام پدر
شماره شناسنامه	سال تولد	شماره تسجیل
۲- امید رو مادر شما بهائیس هستند ؟		
۳- خود شما پیش از ترقیه بهائیت میباشید ؟		
۴- چند سال است که از این آئین پیروی میکنید ؟		
۵- ایام گذشته در روز و باره آئین خود بحث مینمائید ؟		
۶- از اقوام نزدیکان شما آیه کسانی پیرو آئین بهائیت میباشند ؟		
۷- حاضرید از این آئین تبرین بگوئید ؟		
۸- هرا الموعود بقتولانند آیا تم میاید بنویسید ؟		

محل امضا

Official recantation form for Bahá'í children issued by the Ministry of Education at the start of school year in the Fall of 1981. The form requires pupils to provide information on the religious beliefs and observances of their families, and concludes by asking them if they are now prepared to recant their faith.

Bahá'ís), they and their children would ultimately starve.¹²⁹

On June 27, 1980, Yusuf Subhání, a highly regarded member of the Tehran community was summarily executed. This was followed by the executions of the chairman and a second member of the Tabriz Spiritual Assembly on 14 July, a member of the Spiritual Assembly in Rasht on 16 July, and two prominent Bahá'í spokesmen in Tehran on 30 July and 15 August.

Greatly alarmed, the Bahá'í community around the world intensified its efforts to have the persecution halted. The recipient of most of these appeals was President Bani-Sadr. Locked in his political struggles in the Majlis, however, the President was unwilling to meet with representatives of the Iranian Bahá'ís, to issue any public statement that would counteract the vituperation of the mullahs against the Bahá'í minority, or to use the organs of the central government to intervene on behalf of the victims. On the contrary, to the dismay of the Bahá'ís, Bani-Sadr's own newspaper, *Inqiláb Islámí*, on June 21, 1980, published the text of a violent denunciation of the Bahá'í community by a close associate of Khomeini, the Ayatollah Sadduqí, in which the latter claimed to possess documents proving that the Bahá'ís were plotting against the revolution "in every city in Iran." Sadduqí called on the faithful to "hunt down the Bahá'ís whom you know . . . and turn them over to the revolutionary courts." As the influential French newspaper, *Le Monde*, pointed out, the effect of the publication of the ayatollah's sermon in so prestigious a newspaper was to "give it dangerous publicity."¹³⁰

A wave of arrests in several centres justified *Le Monde's* fears. In Tehran, on 20 August, the entire membership of the National Spiritual Assembly, the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, was arrested on a warrant from the

Attorney General, on charges of involvement in an alleged plot (with the Anglican Church) to use CIA funds to finance armed uprisings against the regime. The newspaper reports of the arrests and allegations added more fuel to the fires of public hostility against religious minorities. Then, suddenly, reference to Bahá'í involvement in the alleged plot was dropped, and the government announced that it had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the Bahá'í prisoners. All efforts by the Bahá'í community to secure further information met with no success.¹³¹ When the government was forced to admit a year and a half later that it had secretly shot eight of the nine successors to the vanished Assembly members, the community could only conclude that the first group of prisoners had likewise perished.

In Yazd, where Sadduqí's sermon had been delivered, seven Bahá'ís, including members of the local Bahá'í Assembly, were executed on charges which mixed their Bahá'í membership with alleged support of the previous regime and conspiracy with foreign governments. Over the next several months other executions followed in Tabriz, Tehran, Shíráz, and Hamadán.¹³²

International Protest Grows

IF, AS SEEMS LIKELY, the intent of the Shí'ih leadership in proceeding cautiously with the first formal executions was to determine the extent to which the pogrom would attract international attention, they were not long in finding out. Newspapers and magazines throughout the West carried stories and editorials on the persecution, exposing the lack of any evidence for the charges being made against the victims, and warning that such actions were damaging the credibility of

131. The then Chief Justice of Iran, Ayatollah Beheshti, was to announce six months later that the plot had been "fabricated" by "an unbalanced person" who had forged the key documents. The exposure of this forgery was hailed as a triumph of the system of law under the Islamic Republic. The Anglican detainees were eventually released, but no further reference was made to the Bahá'í prisoners.

132. The Hamadan executions were also the first recorded case in which Bahá'í victims were tortured in the attempt to extract recantations from them before they were shot.

129. "Recantation forms" have been devised and are routinely presented to Bahá'ís, including children in elementary school. Scores of members of the faith have been dragged into mosques throughout the country and beaten in efforts to induce them to sign. (See illustration facing page.)

130. *Le Monde*, Paris, June 24, 1980.

Iran's popular revolution in the eyes of the world.¹³³

National governments, as well as international organizations interested in human rights, began to adopt a more public approach in their protests against the persecutions. On July 16, 1980, the Canadian Parliament passed a unanimous resolution deploring the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís and calling for "this total abuse of religious tolerance" to be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations.¹³⁴ Two months later, on 19 September, the European Parliament went on record as describing the attacks on Iran's Bahá'ís as "a systematic campaign of persecution" and urged the foreign ministers of the member nations of the European Community to bring pressure to bear on the Iranian regime to halt the persecution.¹³⁵ In a surprising addendum, the Parliament went so far as to propose "an embargo on all sales of surplus agricultural produce to Iran, where subsidies by European taxpayers are involved, until full human rights are restored to Iranian citizens." A far-reaching sequence of protests was set in motion that same month at Geneva, when the Sub-Commission on the Protection of Minorities of the U.N. Commission of Human Rights took up the question. As subsequent events were to show, the Sub-Commission's endorsement of the Bahá'ís' concern laid the basis for a steady intensification of international pressure on the Tehran regime over the next three years.¹³⁶

It is difficult to assess precisely the effects of this worldwide outcry. The Bahá'í world had good reason to fear that these executions marked the opening blows in a program of mass execu-

133. See *New York Times*, July 21, 1980; *The Times*, London, July 15 and August 30, 1980; *Le Monde*, August 29, 1980; *The Sunday Statesman*, New Delhi, July 20, 1980; *Newsweek*, March 24, 1980.

134. The Canadian Parliament followed up this step with a second unanimous resolution in June 1981.

135. The diplomats of several European countries were, in fact, already making efforts behind the scenes to persuade the Tehran regime to exercise some control over those responsible.

136. See below.

tions which the fundamentalist mullahs had long threatened. This did not, in fact, take place. Although some twenty other prominent members of the Bahá'í Faith were to die in isolated executions and assassinations over the next year, some restraining influence was clearly at work in Tehran. The regime's sensitivity to foreign pressure, particularly that of certain Western European and Third World nations, was no doubt intensified by the Iran-Iraq war which broke out that fall.¹³⁷

It would not appear that the Bani-Sadr government itself played any significant role in whatever exercise of restraint did take place in Tehran. Marc Kravetz has provided accounts of reactions from spokesmen for the regime to whom he and his fellow journalists appealed on behalf of the Bahá'ís. In the course of a statement which sought to present Islam as "a religion of liberty," Hassan Habibi, Minister of Culture and expert in Islamic constitutional law, justified the exclusion of the Bahá'ís from the protection of the constitution with the mullahs' familiar argument that "Baha'ism is not a religion, but a political doctrine."¹³⁸ Bani-Sadr, when a group of Western journalists appealed to him to save the life of a prominent member of the Bahá'í National Assembly whose character and innocence were well known, was surprisingly candid. The President replied "that his enemies were only awaiting a faux pas in order to mow him down, and what worse faux pas could he commit than to intervene on behalf of a Bahá'í?"¹³⁹

Although Kravetz, like a number of other observers, found the Iranian Bahá'ís remarkably understanding of the difficulties under which the central government was working, and reluctant to agitate their case,¹⁴⁰ his own assessment of the regime is severe:

Bani-Sadr was having more and more trouble defending himself, shutting himself away in

137. The Iraqi war broke out on September 22, 1980.

138. Kravetz, p. 237.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

140. *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40. Eric Rouleau has also noted this phenomenon: "Tous les dirigeants . . . de la communauté baha'ie assassinés," *Le Monde*, Paris, January 1, 1982.

arrogant solitude or indulging in fruitless controversies with his opponents, while trying to outwit them with Islamic initiatives which only isolated him further. New attacks on the Kurds, persecution of the Bahá'ís, firing squads for the "corrupt-on-earth," stonings, Khalkhali's tribunals — Bani-Sadr let all these things go on, never opposed them, even encouraged them at times.¹⁴¹

Muhammad Beheshti and the Third Islamic Revolution

THE QUESTION of the attitude toward the Bahá'í persecution of the Bani-Sadr regime became irrelevant on June 20, 1981. After several months of increasingly outspoken attacks by leading ayatollahs and government party deputies in the Majlis, the President fled from Iran after being summarily deposed by Khomeini. In due course, a second presidential election replaced Bani-Sadr by the prime minister, Muhammad Ali Rajá'í, who was generally regarded as the instrument of the mullahs. A third Islamic Revolution had taken place, and there was now no longer any barrier to the full implementation of the Shí'ih clergy's vision of a purified society which would perfectly reflect the Will of God on earth. By then, Khomeini was being routinely referred to as *the* Imám, a no doubt deliberate ambiguity which was resented by Khomeini's ecclesiastical equals who regarded it as little short of blasphemy, but which was seen by his followers as an appropriate expression of the divine mission with which they believed he was charged.¹⁴²

141. Kravetz, p. 92.

142. The word imám means literally "leader" and is applied to the believer, customarily a mullah, who leads the prayers at the mosque. (Hence, imámjum'ih or "Congregation or 'Friday' leader," the ranking ecclesiastic in a community.) Theologically, the term is used to designate the twelve lineal descendants of Muhammad, who are regarded by the main branch of Shí'ih Muslims as legitimate successors to the prophet and as divinely guided. The last of these, the so-called Twelfth or "Hidden" Imám, is believed to have vanished in the ninth century, but will return in the fullness of time to establish the reign of the saints. To refer to Khomeini as *the* "Imám" leaves an ambiguity about the precise station being claimed for him.

At the practical level, the Will of God was administered by the Ayatollah Beheshti, who had founded the Islamic Republican Party and organized the mullahs into a nationwide political machine reaching into every hamlet and city block in Iran.¹⁴³ This was an impressive feat. The Shí'ih clergy does not possess a hierarchical administrative structure as is the case with most Christian churches, Western political parties, or many international organizations. Each mullah is independent of such administrative control and is free to function as he sees best, so long as he does not lapse into heresy. This jealously guarded feature of Shí'ih ecclesiastical life made the job of mobilizing the mullahs into an effective national organization extremely difficult. It underlines, too, the importance of the support given to the ecclesiastical leadership during the process by the Hujjatíyyih and the Fadá'iyán-i-Islám.

Beheshti and Rajá'í did not have long to enjoy their triumph. The former, together with over sixty of his colleagues in the ruling party, was killed on the morning of June 27, 1980, in a bomb explosion arranged by the Mujáhedín.¹⁴⁴ The Mujáhedín had been irrevocably alienated from the regime by what they considered to be the clergy's theft of a people's revolution. Rajá'í had fortuitously stepped out of the building only a few moments before the explosion, but less than two months later, a second explosion demolished his headquarters. Rajá'í, the newly-appointed Prime Minister, Ayatollah Báonar, and several senior security officials of the regime burned to death in the wreckage.¹⁴⁵ Scores of other ecclesiastics, as well as hundreds of lesser

143. Beheshti, too, was fulsome in his assurances of the protection of religious liberty under the new regime: "Be sure that we will do our best to make Iran the land both of Islam and of freedom. The Prophet has said that no one should force another to believe. . . ." (Kravetz, p. 113).

144. Official Iranian sources put the number of victims at seventy-two, presumably because, in Islamic tradition, that was the number of the martyred companions of the Imám Husayn.

145. Ironically, the purpose of the meeting which was in progress at the time was a discussion on ways to protect the leadership from assassination.

functionaries and revolutionary guards, have since been killed by bombs, bullets, knives, and dynamite in the Mujáhedín's campaign of political assassination which quickly turned government offices into virtual prison-fortresses.

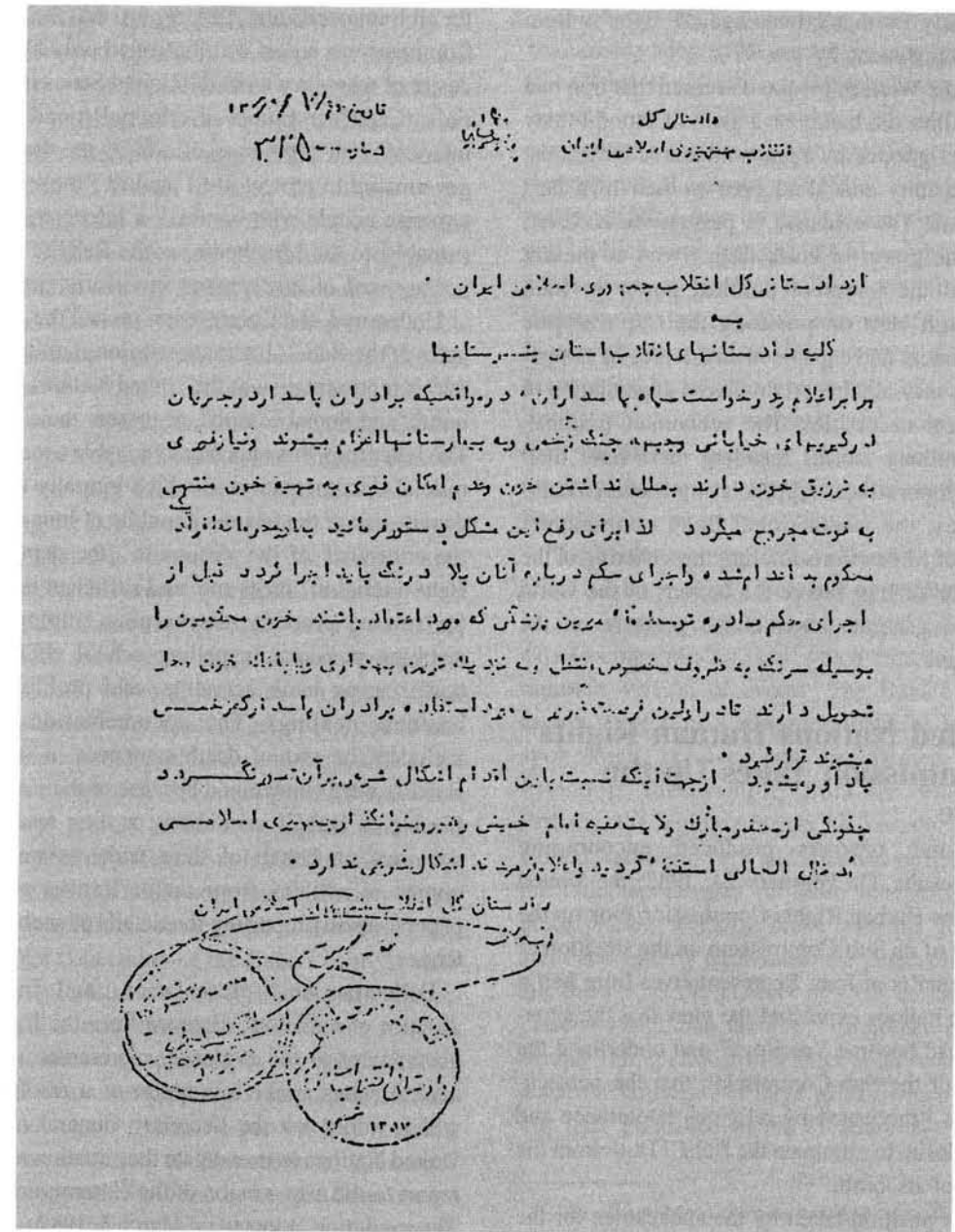
Whatever satisfaction the political underground derived from these dramatic demonstrations of organization and daring, the assassinations did not bring about the collapse of the regime, which was the announced intention. Rather, to the series of calamities produced by foreign war, ethnic and tribal uprisings, economic disintegration, and international opprobrium was added the constant insecurity of political terrorism.¹⁴⁶

A Reign of Terror

THROUGH ALL THESE manifestations of social pathology, the regime steadily intensified the campaign against the Bahá'ís. During the Bani-Sadr period a total of 32 officials or prominent teachers of the Bahá'í Faith were executed, including those who were murdered in the streets or in their homes by revolutionary guards and mobs under the direction of mullahs. Since the triumph of the fundamentalists in June 1981, 140 more believers who had been outstanding in the service of their faith have been put to death at the order of revolutionary courts.¹⁴⁷ By the late summer of 1981, revolutionary courts were openly sentencing Bahá'ís to death on purely religious grounds and announcing the fact in the Iranian media. Ayatollah Sadduqí declared Bahá'ís to be "*mahdur ad-damm*" (those whose blood may be shed), and the Attorney General, Siyyid Moussavi-Tabrizí stated explicitly: "The

Qur'án recognizes only the People of the Book [i.e., Muslims, Jews, Christians and, by special dispensation, Zoroastrians] as religious communities. Others are pagans. Pagans must be eliminated."¹⁴⁸

Horrors multiplied daily: an elderly man and his wife in the village of Núk drenched in kerosene, set afire, and forced to run through their own fields until they fell dying; Bahá'í girls kidnapped from their families, forced to marry Muslims and threatened with divorce and disgrace once they became pregnant, unless they recanted their faith; graves broken open and the bodies of highly respected Bahá'ís dragged through the streets to be burned on garbage heaps; Bahá'ís declared by mullahs to be sub-human, bridled like donkeys, led through the streets, chained in stables and fed on grass; widows compelled to pay the price of the bullets which had killed their husbands and then evicted from their homes with only the clothes they were wearing; condemned persons executed after having much of their blood drained out for use in field hospitals on the Iraqi front; and appalling tortures practised on prisoners in the unending attempt to force the Bahá'ís to recant their faith.¹⁴⁹ All this against the background of daily life in which Bahá'ís had become social outcasts with no recourse against whatever abuse the ill-disposed chose to commit. Bahá'í marriages, regardless of duration, were declared dissolved, Bahá'í family life was deemed prostitution (itself punishable by death), and Bahá'í children were judged illegitimate and their parents denied any right to them in civil law. Indeed, the clergy's proposed Law of Retaliation, if adopted, would



Order from the Attorney General of the Islamic Republic instructing all local and provincial prosecutors that the blood of condemned persons should be "drained by syringe and transferred to appropriate containers by reliable medical personnel . . . for use by our wounded Pasdar brothers (i.e., revolutionary guards)." The Attorney General assures his officials that "the Imám Khomeini . . . has indicated that there is no objection in Islamic canon law."

146. It is significant that, despite the hostility to the Bahá'ís, no suggestion has been made in any quarter that they are implicated in the assassinations or other terrorist acts.

147. Initially, the executions were carried out by local revolutionary courts on their own initiative. The involvement of the I.R.P.'s national leadership was signalled by the willingness of the hierarchy, headed by Ayatollah Beheshti, who had previously denied all knowledge of the executions, to begin formally approving the death sentences, in the Spring of 1981.

148. "Iran Plans a Final Solution," *Sunday Times*, London, September 20, 1981.

149. Several popular books have recently appeared describing the community's ordeal: William Sears, *A Cry from the Heart*; Christine Hakim, *Les bahá'ís: victoire sur la violence*; Geoffrey Nash, *Iran's Secret Pogrom*. (See illustration facing page.)

explicitly exempt crimes against Bahá'ís from any punishment by law.¹⁵⁰

To the Western media, it seemed that Iran had fallen into the hands of a gang of blood-thirsty fanatics gripped by a paranoid hatred for the rest of humanity and blind even to their own best interests. The evidence is persuasive, however, that the group of ecclesiastics who at present control the levers of political power in Iran, although bent on pursuing their apocalyptic experiment and capable of any degree of savagery this may require, retain a keen appreciation of practical necessities. The economic, political, and military storms assailing them have their own imperatives. Appreciating these circumstances, the international Bahá'í community intensified its efforts to bring the suffering of the Bahá'ís of Iran before the nations of the world and to generate international pressure on the regime.

United Nations Human Rights Commission Takes Up the Case

THESE EFFORTS produced encouraging results. On February 24, 1982, the United Nations Human Rights Commission took up the report of its Sub-Commission on the situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran. Representatives from half a dozen nations expressed the view that the situation had become "perilous" and underlined the view of the Sub-Commission that the persecution is "motivated by religious intolerance and by a desire to eliminate the Bahá'í Faith from the land of its birth."¹⁵¹

The position taken by the spokesmen for the Islamic Republic of Iran was to deny the existence of such a problem and to insist that their nation's constitution assures religious freedom

for all Iranian citizens. They argued that the Sub-Commission's report was motivated only by the desire of what they termed "United States imperialism and her European criminal friends" to interfere with legitimate efforts of the Iranian government to protect itself against "those who terrorize people with bombs," a reference, presumably, to the Mujáhedín, as the Bahá'ís were not accused of involvement in terrorist acts.¹⁵²

Undeterred, the Commission invited the delegates of the Bahá'í International Community, the faith's representative at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, to present their case. The latter took this opportunity to table a mass of official documentation in which virtually every department of the Islamic Republic of Iran states the adherence of the victims to "the depraved Bahá'í religion" as its sole and sufficient reason for seizing property, discharging employees, revoking pensions, expelling school children, confiscating bank accounts, and prohibiting business dealings. The documentation also included the text of death sentences in which Bahá'ís were condemned because of their membership in Bahá'í institutions or their teaching activities on behalf of their faith, as well as copies of articles from major Iranian newspapers, openly reporting the details of such sentences.

Following this presentation, and in the absence of a relevant response from the Iranian government to the evidence, representatives of several states spoke in support of a resolution which would ask the Secretary General of the United Nations to investigate the situation and to report to the next session of the Commission.¹⁵³ The resolution, adopted on March 5, 1982, asked the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate with the Secretary General's mission.

152. *Note verbale*, January 19, 1983, from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, addressed to the United Nations Centre [sic] for Human Rights.

153. The countries voting for the Resolution were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Fiji, France, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Netherlands, Panama, Rwanda, Togo, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, West Germany, Zambia.

150. The Bill seeks to restore the full corpus of medieval Islamic law with different schedules of rights and penalties for Muslims and members of the three "tolerated minorities" (Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians). Other persons ("infidels") will have no recourse to civil protection.

151. The Iranian government made three statements before the Commission.

Attempt at Justification

AN INTERESTING FEATURE of the debate was the first appearance of a lengthy rationale which was later to become the foundation for the regime's attempt to counter criticism of its treatment of its Bahá'í citizens. The origin of the argument may reflect the degree of cooperation then existing between the Islamic Republic's leadership and the Túdeh (Communist) Party, as the central thesis had first appeared in the article on the Bahá'í Faith in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.¹⁵⁴ When it became apparent that the resolution would pass the Commission, the Iranian government's spokesman argued that the faith was part of a vast conspiracy concocted during the late nineteenth century by the British and Russian governments, in which individuals had been discovered, persuaded that they were messiahs, and induced to start ostensibly religious movements aimed at undermining the ability of colonial peoples to resist their exploiters.¹⁵⁵ The chief target of this conspiracy was the Islamic world since, in the words of the Iranian statement: "Islam, especially in the past century, proved to be the toughest and most successful opponent of colonialism and imperialism, and the major contributor of many liberation movements throughout the world." The original conception of the Bahá'í Faith, specifically, was attributed to Tsarist Russia. Subsequently, control over the faith had been secured, in a manner not explained, by the British Foreign Office. More recently, the faith had been transformed, again through a process not revealed, into an extension of "international Zionism." The proposed resolution before the Commission was, therefore, merely an attempt by imperialistic nations to protect their investment.

154. For this information I am indebted to Professor Firuz Kazemzadeh, Department of History, Yale University. Professor Kazemzadeh points out that the thesis was originally developed by a Soviet theoretician, M.S. Ivanov, in a book published in Moscow in the 1930s, under the title *The Bábí Uprisings in Iran*.

155. Cruder versions of the argument have also been printed for the use of Islamic student groups at Third World universities.

The rationale is interesting because it was presumably adopted to counter growing criticism from Third World nations. This pressure, coming from so many smaller nations, appears to have constituted a continuing embarrassment: atrocities committed against law-abiding citizens cannot be justified even on those grounds of necessity which are advanced to explain the suppression of internal political enemies, the campaign against separatist movements, or conflicts with other nations. Despite their desire to exterminate heresy, the regime had political priorities, which, at the moment, were more urgent than the Bahá'í question. Under international pressure, the Iranian authorities admitted that the Bahá'ís pose no political threat.¹⁵⁶

The Iranian government's vulnerability to criticism has been greatly increased by the tendency of its former servants and political allies to expose embarrassing facts which contradict the regime's version of events. The Bahá'í community's rejection of allegations made by Iranian spokesmen received an unexpected confirmation, for example, from Dr. Mansour Farhang, the regime's former ambassador to the United Nations in 1979 and who had earlier been the chief spokesman of those allegations. In January 1982, Farhang broke with his government and bitterly denounced the persecution of the Bahá'ís as the product of what he called a "fascist totalitarian ideology" promoted by the Islamic ruling clique. In a letter to an American academic colleague (a large part of which letter was later published in the February 27, 1982,

156. The embarrassment can be inferred from the intensive efforts the regime is making to counter Bahá'í claims, although pretending its indifference to foreign opinion. These efforts extended to the publication of a document entitled *Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran* published by the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and distributed to members of the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee, November 18, 1982. Twelve of the booklet's thirty-two pages consist of a defense against the charge of persecuting the Bahá'ís, and include, for the first time, the admission that "the beliefs of a few hundred followers of the Bahá'í Sect which has no logical or politico-ideological justification, is not reckoned to be a danger to us. . . ." (p. 30).

issue of *The Nation*), Farhang described what his own investigations in Tehran had revealed:

The truth is that not only have the Bahá'ís been persecuted for more than a century, but they have also been the most vulnerable of all the religious minorities in the country. This has been the case regardless of what ideological or political orientation happens to be in power. . . . Since the early months of the revolutionary victory . . . the Khomeini regime, just like the Shah's regime during the 1955-56 period of state-led persecution of the Bahá'ís, has increasingly repressed its progressive political opponents and used the Bahá'ís as scapegoats. . . . Khomeini is far more brutal than the Shah ever was.¹⁵⁷

Efforts at Concealment

AS INTERNATIONAL PROTEST mounted, the Shí'ih hierarchy sought refuge in concealment. References to the Bahá'í membership of victims vanished from official government news releases, to be replaced by various euphemistic, but universally understood phrases such as that depraved sect, enemies of God and His Prophet, those who are not members of one of the accepted (constitutional) religions, infidels, etc. In December 1981, when Shí'ih fundamentalists finally arrested eight of the nine members of the National Bahá'í Assembly (who had replaced those kidnapped and presumably murdered in August 1980), the victims were killed in secrecy. The eight were shot in the cellars of Evin Prison on the night of 27 December, without even the usual formality of a summary trial before an Islamic revolutionary tribunal.¹⁵⁸ The bodies were buried under cover of dark in a plot of barren land set aside as a graveyard for infidels. Official secrecy, however, broke down. The

bodies were discovered fortuitously, and news of the executions was carried by Agence France Presse and Reuters wire services.

Apparently confident that no evidence supporting the story existed, the Chief Justice of Iran, the Ayatollah Moussavi-Ardibílí, called a press conference on January 3, 1982, attended by Western as well as Iranian journalists, at which he denied categorically that the executions had taken place.¹⁵⁹ He pictured the charge as an example of an effort by Bahá'ís to tarnish the integrity of the Islamic Revolution. Three days later, however, Ardibílí was compelled to issue a second statement when the Bahá'í International Community produced photostatic copies of the death certificates signed by the regime's own prison doctors.¹⁶⁰ Forced into a humiliating retreat, the Chief Justice admitted that the Bahá'ís had been killed. He explained that they had been shot as "Zionist spies," although obviously no trial on such charges had taken place. Unwisely, he went on to include in his statement a gratuitous assurance that "a Muslim would have been executed similarly on the same charge." Two days later it was revealed that, on 4 January, seven more Bahá'ís, including six members of the Local Assembly of Tehran, were shot in Evin Prison under the same clandestine circumstances as the members of the national body. The husband of their hostess (herself the seventh victim) was released when he agreed to the publication of a letter stating that he was a Muslim who had been misguided.¹⁶¹

159. The 5 January issue of *Le Monde* carried Ardibílí's denial.

160. *Bahá'ís in Iran*, p. 13 dated December 28, 1981. The certificates of the Central Islamic Revolutionary Court each describe the illness from which the deceased died as "shot with bullets" and the presiding physician as "the Department of Justice." (See illustration facing page.)

161. *Le Monde* carried this further statement and the subsequent stories in its issues of 5 January, 8 January, and 9 January. The paper asked: Why were the authorities silent about a trial which, to all appearances never took place? Why were they (the Bahá'í officials) buried illicitly, in the dead of night, without notification of families? Is Tehran ashamed of assassinations which bring dishonour on their 'Islamic Justice'?

Death certificate of Quadrat Rawhani, one of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran whom the Islamic regime originally denied having killed. The certificate is dated December 28, 1981 by the Central Islamic Revolutionary Court; the cause of death is described as "shot with bullets" and the administering physician is given as "Department of Justice."

157. Letter to Professor Richard Falk, Center for International Studies, Princeton, N.J., *The Nation*, February 27, 1982.

158. *Le Monde* carried stories on the executions in its December 30, 1981 and January 1, 1982 issues, when the deaths were first discovered.

Factional Conflict within the Islamic Leadership

THIS SEQUENCE of events illustrates the dilemma which the regime faces in its efforts to steer a course between meeting the minimal desires for acceptance by the international community and its desire to purge Iran of any influence that does not reflect its conception of human society. Meanwhile, a much more serious issue has gripped the attention of the clergy, the signs that the Islamic Revolution may be about to move into another and undesired phase.

So far, the revolution has followed the pattern outlined in Crane Brinton's classic study of such phenomena.¹⁶² The old order has been overthrown, Bani-Sadr and his Dantonists have followed Bázargán's Girondins into the discard, the entire apparatus of state power has been successfully taken over by the Jacobins of the Islamic Republican Party, and the Reign of Terror and Virtue proceeds unchecked. There remains only one stage to traverse before Thermidor brings the presumably inevitable reaction. The "ultras," the extremist fringe who do not know when a revolution has succeeded, must also be confronted and decisively crushed.

The group which presents itself for the "ultra" role is Mahmud Halabí and the Hujjatíyyih. Their differences with the ruling ecclesiastical faction are primarily matters of theological dispute arising out of a world view as apocalyptic as any in Brinton's catalogue. Briefly, the Hujjatíyyih believe that mankind, ever since the termination of the ministry of Muhammad and his lineal successors in the ninth century, has sunk steadily deeper into darkness and "moral filth." Only the Hidden Imám can save man, and all worldly efforts to improve man's lot are

162. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*. Brinton's study of four revolutions (the English, American, French, and Russian) convinced him that the phenomenon arises in certain typical conditions, has common features regardless of where it takes place, produces typical results, and passes through predictable stages. His typology is frequently appealed to in attempts to predict the course of events in contemporary revolutionary upheavals.

positively harmful because they delay the final collapse that will bring about the long-awaited advent.¹⁶³ Such worldly efforts include the institution of the Veláyat-i-Faqh, the role of theological Governor General, which the constitution confers upon the Ayatollah Khomeini. The theological foundations for such an authority are regarded by many of the Islamic clergy as highly doubtful, and all involved are keenly aware that control over this central institution will represent a decisive edge in the next stage of the political struggle.¹⁶⁴ For both reasons, support for the Veláyat-i-Faqh concept in conservative circles has tended to be vague and equivocal at best. The Anjuman-i-Hujjat, while giving lip service to Khomeini's personal role as the inspirer and guide of the revolution, has stubbornly resisted the idea that any individual can serve as the "trustee" for the long-awaited Twelfth or Hidden Imám. Halabí was quoted as saying that he is himself a more reliable voice for the Will of the Almighty than is Khomeini, since the latter is merely a distinguished theologian, while Halabí claims direct spiritual communication with the Twelfth Imám.¹⁶⁵

These views have provoked strong reaction from others in the regime. As early as November 1981, the Ayatollah Jannatí, one of the principal ecclesiastics in Qom, the religious capital, delivered a Friday sermon in the form of a public interrogation of the Hujjatíyyih. The text, which was published in full in *Ettelá'át*, a leading

163. "Iranian Press Digest," Tehran, October 12, 1982 summarizes the Hujjatíyyih view of current history. Since one of the themes of the Bahá'í Faith is that its founder, Bahá'u'lláh, is the fulfilment of the advent of the Hidden Imám, the Hujjatíyyih interpretation of Islam is especially vulnerable to Bahá'í arguments.

164. Since the basis of the mullahs' attacks on past regimes has always been the latter's lack of legitimacy, their own regime now becomes vulnerable to this charge. Hence the anxiety of the current leadership to secure acceptance of the authority of the Veláyat-i-Faqh. The stance of the Hujjatíyyih is that this is a man-made device with no more Islamic legitimacy than the Pahlavi monarchy. Since all government is at best a trusteeship for the Hidden Imám, the State should be no more than the instrument of the ecclesiastical hierarchy who act as his proxies, and subject to change as they deem advisable.

165. *Time* magazine, December 7, 1981, p. 45.

Tehran daily, sheds an interesting light on the government's concerns:

Before the Revolution, you were either against the Revolution or indifferent towards it. Have you now changed your policy? Are you willing to accept that your previous policy was wrong and if not, why have you now changed your policy? Why do you persist in penetrating various government information agencies and collecting information from them? What purpose do you have for this information? Why do you not share or pass information you collect to other revolutionary agencies? . . . What legal grounds do you have for using government facilities for the benefit of your own organization? What is the reason that you are opposing the left wing of the counter-revolution, but ignore the right wing? . . . These are important questions, and we want them answered.¹⁶⁶

In February 1982, the newspaper, *Subh-i-Ázádegán*, published the above-mentioned series of articles by Mehdi Tayyeb, a Majlis deputy who had abandoned a leadership position in the Hujjatíyyih after being converted to the constitutional principle of the Veláyat-i-Faqh.¹⁶⁷ The newspaper is regarded as the voice of that segment of the ruling élite which has championed the confrontation with the United States. The ostensible purpose of the series was to urge patience and tolerance among the various elements within the Islamic Republic. As all are working for the same basic purpose, however different the origins of their groups may be, they should cease criticizing one another. The revolution must be seen as both religious and political in nature, and its leaders must avoid a tendency to focus on one aspect to the detriment of the others. These observations are used to introduce a critique of the Anjuman-i-Hujjat as an organization which deviates from the principle of revolutionary unity. While recognizing Sheikh Halabí's virtue and learning, the articles picture him as an

166. *Ettelá'át*, November 1, 1981.

167. There were five articles published consecutively in the issues of *Subh-i-Ázádegán*, February 14-18, 1982.

individual who "devotes his attention to religious subjects and disputes, and neglects the political aspects of religion," a course of action which runs the danger of distracting Muslims from "the dangers of American imperialism."¹⁶⁸ This attitude is said to have led the Hujjatíyyih to doubt that the revolution could ever succeed and to involve themselves in an improper collaboration with the Pahlavi regime.¹⁶⁹

The articles contained veiled warnings to the other "grand ayatollahs," those whose theological stature matches or exceeds that of Ayatollah Khomeini. These clerics have shared with the Hujjatíyyih a rejection of the institution of the Veláyat-i-Faqh or at least a refusal to express themselves unequivocally on its theological basis. Ayatollahs Khú'í and Shariat Madári were especially mentioned and were cautioned that the Hujjatíyyih are unreliable allies who serve only their own interests.

Mahmud Halabí and a Fourth Islamic Revolution?

THE RESPONSE of the Hujjatíyyih was muted. Avoiding any direct confrontation with the ruling authorities, they attempted to reply by representing criticisms against their organization as part of a propaganda campaign by the Communist Túdeh party.¹⁷⁰ Halabí himself is said to have repudiated the interview in which he claimed a special measure of divine guidance. Nevertheless, the Anjuman continued to operate as a secret organization and to resist all efforts to force it to be registered officially as a political party (a step which would subject it to government inspection).

To the doctrinal differences was added the weight of certain economic and political considerations. Many of the conservative rural clergy

168. Article of February 14.

169. Article of February 16.

170. Articles signed by "Nasir-i-Din Kermani" in *Kayhán*, September 11, 1982. The Túdeh had published a series of booklets on political themes, one of which attacked the Hujjatíyyih.

are deeply suspicious of the central government's efforts to reorganize the economy on a national scale: in agricultural policy particularly, there has been a well-founded fear that the plans of the technocrats in the capital entail the nationalization of the huge endowments which finance much of the work of the mosques. At the political level, rumours abounded that the central authorities had failed to act against communism with the same vigour as they attacked the West because the leadership had been infiltrated by Soviet agents and Marxist ideology. As the conservatives are in a minority in the Majlis, they placed great emphasis on the Council of Guardians as the guarantor of the Republic's theological purity, and viewed every accretion of power to the Majlis as a threat to this bulwark. The Anjuman-i-Hujjat was seen by many in the ruling faction as seeking to mobilize this growing right-wing resentment into a political movement.

It is with respect to this final phase that Iran's Islamic revolution may deviate from Brinton's helpful paradigm. In theory, the "ultras" are "impractical people," a kind of "lunatic fringe" who lack the capacity for organization and who "definitely do not succeed in attaining power."¹⁷¹ The Hujjatíyyih, however, have exhibited a talent for organization and a matching capacity for intrigue. As the price for their decisive support of the ruling clergy during the successive struggles with other groups in the original revolutionary movement, the Hujjatíyyih were accorded freedom to expand at all levels of society. Today, their sympathizers are believed to have infiltrated the entire political structure of the country. The full extent is not known, as the Hujjatíyyih continue to operate in a semiclandestine manner. The group appears to control a bloc of seats in the Majlis and several institutions in the Islamic State. Their nationwide network of conservative mullahs and komitehs is backed by heavily-armed segments of the Revolutionary Guard and is a power in several major cities. They also exercise an important influence in the so-called Council of Guardians, the supervisory

171. Brinton, p. 168.

body created in the Islamic Constitution, which serves as a watchdog of the theological purity of legislation and which has not hesitated to veto decisions of the Majlis with which it has disagreed. This rising power has challenged the course which the Islamic Republic has followed under the leadership of the Ayatollah Beheshtí's successors. There is, therefore, still room for doubt as to which faction will succeed in the next stage of the political conflict, once the Ayatollah Khomeini dies. A Fourth Islamic Revolution may, in fact, be taking shape.

Throughout 1983, tension between these two dominant Shí'ih factions daily became more a matter of public discussion. What seemed to be happening was that persons in the ruling clique who had made use of Hujjatíyyih support in their climb to power now saw the need to disavow a movement whose squalid past and reactionary views had become a political embarrassment. Prominent figures in the regime like President Alí Khámeneí, Foreign Minister Alí-Akbar Veláyatí and the Oil Minister, Muhammad Gharazi, all of whom are believed to have been deeply involved with the Hujjatíyyih at one time, felt it necessary to make public statements dissociating themselves from it and explaining that they had supported only its anti-Bahá'í activity; other ministers were dropped from the cabinet because of their continuing links with the Hujjatíyyih.¹⁷² Most recently, some supporters of the ruling party have begun to designate themselves "Imamis" in order to identify their cause with Khomeini and to distinguish themselves from the Hujjatíyyih.

The dispute first came into the open in December 1982, when Sádeq Khalkháli used his campaign for election to the Council of Experts (who are to choose Khomeini's successor) as an occasion for a bitter attack on his former partners.¹⁷³ For the first time, charges against the Anjuman-i-Hujjat which had previously been

172. *Washington Post*, December 10, 1982. Labour Minister Ahmad Tavakkoli and Commerce Minister Habib Asgar-Owladí were dropped (*Iran Times*, August 5, 1983).

173. Excerpts of the speech were quoted in *Iran Times*, December 17, 1982.

only hinted at in official circles were publicly made by one who has been regarded as close to Khomeini himself. Khalkháli described Halabí and his organization as supporters of the Pahlavis and collaborators with SAVAK, and charged them, as well, with being agents of the CIA. Such accusations became steadily more frequent over the next several months and finally, at the end of the Ramadan fasting period, in July 1983, the Ayatollah Khomeini himself made a speech which was clearly an attack on the Anjuman-i-Hujjat:

Another group's theme is to let sin become rampant so that the Twelfth Iman appears. . . . What is he coming for? The Twelfth Iman comes to remove sin. Are we to commit sin to make him appear? . . . For God's sake, if you are Muslims, and for the sake of your country if you are nationalists, get rid of factionalism and enter into the wave that is now taking the nation. Do not swim against it, for it will break your arms and legs.¹⁷⁴

Two weeks later, the Anjuman-i-Hujjat announced that it was temporarily suspending organized activities. This uncharacteristically cooperative attitude did not allay the fears of the ruling party. Government spokesmen have since charged that the Hujjatíyyih are engaged in a clandestine effort to provoke public unrest by the artificial creation of large-scale shortages of food and other necessities through hoarding and price inflation.

Deteriorating Position of the Bahá'ís

ALL SUCH QUESTIONS can have only academic interest for Iran's Bahá'ís. The one point upon which both factions of the Shí'ih clergy are agreed, apart from their antipathy to things foreign, is their determination to extirpate the Bahá'í Faith. The Hujjatíyyih, of course, have made this an objective of their organization from the time of its inception in the 1950s, alleging

174. See *International Herald Tribune*, August 12, 1983, page 5.

that Bahá'í teachings endanger the very moral fibre of Islam. The ruling faction of the clergy, on the other hand, insist that it is their efforts, not those of the Hujjatíyyih, which have been successful in suppressing the Bahá'í threat. They argue that the real issues in Iran are political rather than theological, and that "Bahá'ism" is essentially an aspect of the campaign by foreign imperialist forces to dominate Iran. It is the Islamic Revolution (originally opposed by the Hujjatíyyih) which must be credited with overcoming foreign threats. In the Friday sermon mentioned above, the Ayatollah Jannatí made the point firmly:

Before the revolution you [i.e., the Hujjatíyyih] were involved in the "anti-Bahá'ism movement," arguing that the Bahá'ís are a danger to Islam and have ties to Israel. We already knew all that. Our position was that they must be cut off at the roots, while you were doing no more than chopping away at their leaves and branches. Very well! Now they have been denied any place at all under the Islamic Republic. The Bahá'ís and all other anti-Islamic groups are not permitted even to breathe. What then are your present objectives?¹⁷⁵

The extent to which the entire Shí'ih hierarchy are implicated in the campaign to suppress the Bahá'í Faith is revealed in an astonishing interview given to the leading Tehran daily, *Kayhán*, by the Ayatollah Gilání, judge of the central revolutionary court at Evin Prison in January 1982. Speaking of the execution of the members of the Bahá'í National Assembly and of the Assembly of Tehran, which had taken place three weeks earlier, the ayatollah emphasized that

in cases of the execution of members of such groups, it is necessary to have not only the approval of the presiding judge of the Revolutionary Court, but also the endorsement of the verdict by a qualified mujtahid [a Muslim theologian]. In addition, the case must be reviewed by the High Court in Qom. If such

175. See above pp. 60-61.

V.

Response to the Persecution

THE OBJECTIVE of the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, from the time the pogroms began in the mid-nineteenth century, has been to eliminate a new religion which has been seen as a rival to the dominant faith of Iran, the Shí'ih sect of Islam. This motivation has at all times been explicit in the pronouncements of the Muslim clergymen who have initiated and led the successive attacks, and continues to be frankly expressed in their communications to the Iranian public, although denied in statements made for foreign release. The method adopted in the current phase of this long campaign is to attempt to force the Bahá'ís of Iran, by terror, ostracism, and economic pressure, to recant their beliefs. This would not only end what the mullahs regard as a threat to their religion's dominant position and to their own role in Iranian society, but also would demonstrate, they believe, the moral superiority of Islam over a faith which claims to represent a more recent expression of divine guidance, particularly in the social life of mankind.¹⁸⁰

The rapid growth of the Bahá'í community around the world has had the effect of creating a second powerful motivation for the persecution, one that has figured prominently in statements by the Iranian regime. This has been to cut off, at the source, the large contributions which the Bahá'ís of Iran had been making to the international work of their faith. Because of its long-established character and its sheer size, the Iranian Bahá'í community had been providing a substantial portion of the funds which subsidized the

activities of their coreligionists in Third World countries. Their resources had also made it possible for them to contribute generously to the building program which has given rise to the complex of shrines, gardens, archives, and administrative headquarters at the faith's international centre in Haifa. Moreover, Iranian Bahá'ís had constituted a majority of the thousands of members of their faith who had been serving in Bahá'í teaching and development projects around the globe. The Shí'ih clergy's concern about this matter, as evidenced by the contents of indictments of Bahá'ís before revolutionary tribunals, as well as a host of other official pronouncements, has approached something of an obsession and reveals the importance which the mullahs attach to "suffocating" Bahá'í activities overseas by denying them necessary resources.¹⁸¹

In both respects, the persecution has failed to achieve its objectives. Within Iran, the efforts at coercion have yet to produce any significant number of Bahá'ís prepared to renounce their commitment to their religion. This is true not only of the leaders of the community, but also of believers in humble walks of life, as the outcome of an attack on villagers at Ival in the summer of 1983 demonstrated. At the instigation of the local Muslim clergy over 130 Bahá'í villagers were penned up in an open enclosure, with their children and infants, and denied food or water in an attempt to coerce them into converting to Islam. When several days had passed without any recantations being received, the victims were beaten and driven into the forest. Throughout Iran, Bahá'ís have faced death sentences, the loss of

180. This view will seem grotesque to most Westerners. In part, it rests on the unarguable principle that a faith which will be surrendered by its adherents in return for their lives or property lacks spiritual authority. More particularly, however, Shí'ih Muslims have made a virtual cult of their eagerness to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs, a phenomenon which figures with ever greater frequency in news reports of military conflicts in the Middle East.

181. See, for example, *Bahá'ís in Iran*, pp. 73, 80. Bahá'ís who were subjected to preliminary questioning and briefly released while their formal indictments were being prepared, have reported that intense attention was given to financial and property matters, and particularly to contributions made to the international work of the faith.



Interview with Hujjat-u'l-Islám Qazáí, Religious Judge and President of the Revolutionary Court of Shíráz who had just handed down death sentences to 22 Bahá'ís. The interview was published in the Shíráz daily, *Khabar-i-Junúb* (#782, February 22, 1983). The main headline, in bold print, reads: "Religious Court of Shíráz: I advise the Bahá'ís to return to the bosom of Islam." The left-hand column immediately below the headline summarizes the interview, beginning with the following words: "Before it is too late, Bahá'ís must recant Bahá'ísm. . . ."

property, savings, pensions and jobs, and have seen their children denied an education, but have refused the most insistent efforts to reduce them to escape these penalties by even token recantations. In this respect, the persecution can have done little more than purge the Iranian Bahá'í community of some of its marginal members. If the histories of other religions are any guide, even persons who temporarily submit to such threats have not been influenced in their underlying opinions and can be expected to seek readmission to the company of the believers as soon as the persecutions have subsided.

Throughout the rest of the Bahá'í world, there is no evidence that the sudden loss of Iranian support has had an appreciable effect in slowing the growth and consolidation of the faith's activities. The Bahá'í community organizes its work in a series of international plans extending through various lengths of time, from five to ten years. The goals of each of these undertakings include the creation of thousands of new Bahá'í groups; the purchase of properties for schools, community centres, and houses of worship; the publication of Bahá'í literature in various languages and native dialects; the establishment of local and national institutions; and a range of similar projects. The current plan, scheduled to run seven years, was launched in 1979, only a few months after the Islamic revolution began in Iran. At the halfway point in April 1983, the members of the national spiritual assemblies of the Bahá'í world gathered in Haifa, Israel, for the election of the faith's supreme governing body, the Universal House of Justice, an event that takes place every five years. During the course of the convention, delegates reviewed a detailed analysis of progress in their international plan, which indicated that its goals were not merely being achieved but, in many areas, considerably surpassed.¹⁸² Clearly, other national Bahá'í communities have picked up the deficit created by the cut-off in support from Iran.

182. For a mid-Plan report on the progress being made see *The Seven Year Plan, 1979-1986*, Statistical Report, Ridván, 1983.

Unintended Effects

A PART FROM ITS FAILURE to achieve its objectives, the campaign against the Bahá'ís may be having results undesired by those who have undertaken it. Within Iran, the significance of the events has no doubt not been lost on the public, including the series of clandestine Bahá'í executions duly reported by foreign radio broadcasts in the Persian language. A dramatic counterpoint has been offered by the public hearings given to the Túdeh leaders, arrested last summer. For several days, during the same period in which Bahá'í women and girls were accepting death rather than betray their religion, the Iranian public watched on national television while the entire leadership of the Túdeh party, led by party leader Núrí'd-dín Kiánúrí, abjectly confessed to a series of offenses ranging from espionage to treason, and pleaded for forgiveness.¹⁸³ In such an atmosphere, the failed attempts to coerce the Bahá'ís may well have precisely the opposite effect to the one intended. Given the growing public hatred of the clergy, on which many foreign observers have remarked,¹⁸⁴ the moral fortitude of the Bahá'í victims may well prove to be the key that will at last admit their once ostracized community to public acceptance.

As to the rest of the world, there is no question that the persecution has been entirely counterproductive. Millions of people who had little or no knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, particularly in Western countries, have now been introduced to these subjects in a highly sympathetic context, solely through the publicity generated by the Iranian situation. At the recent gathering in Haifa, several national Bahá'í delegations reported greatly increased enrollments as the result of this widespread propagation of Bahá'í ideals. The series of hearings given to the Bahá'í case by various agencies of

183. "Le deuxième Satan," *L'Express*, May 12, 1983.

184. See, for example, the recent reviews done by *Le Monde: Édition Internationale*, June 2-8, 1983, "L'Iran en mal de 'normalisation'." And *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July, 1983, "Iran, un régime au bord du vide."

the United Nations has had the effect of strengthening the recognition of the Bahá'í International Community by those agencies. Similarly, at the national level, Bahá'í delegations have been sympathetically received by leaders of thought interested in both the plight of the Iranian community and the system of beliefs and community life which have attracted such opposition from a quarter which was already giving cause for grave international concern. It would be difficult to imagine a campaign of publicity and public education, initiated by a religious minority itself, being able to generate such widespread public interest.

Further, there is already a considerable body of evidence which suggests that the campaign against the Bahá'ís may be claiming an entirely unintended victim. This is the moral authority of Islam, in whose name and alleged defense the persecution is being conducted. What does the average Iranian make of the assertion that the Qur'án provides full authority for the hanging of housewives and teenage girls because they belong to a different religion? What effect does it have on the view of Islam held by the populations of Western lands to have the religion of the prophet Muhammad identified with atrocities that revolt the conscience of humanity? What conclusions are Third World statesmen and jurists to reach when told by Iranian representatives at the United Nations that the worldwide concern for human rights is merely a Western attitude that ignores the deeper insights of Shí'ih theology?¹⁸⁵ In such a situation it is useless to protest, as a few distinguished Muslim spokesmen have sought to do, that these reac-

185. "The legal system of Islam . . . has its own procedures, codes and due processes. If our nation is free under the Covenant to choose its religion, . . . without having to seek permission from Western jurists, and if the cultural chauvinism of the distinguished Dutch delegate would permit him to recognize Islam as a viable alternative to Western legal system [sic], then I wonder why we have to be discussing these baseless allegations instead of . . . finding means to end imperialist exploitation of Third World masses, and remove the savage Pretoria regime and the Zionist entity." (Delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran, statement to the 37th Session of the General Assembly, November 23, 1982.)

tions are manifestations of a historic prejudice against Islam.¹⁸⁶ Such prejudice does indeed exist and should be a matter of serious concern, but like most inherited attitudes it had been breaking down under the integrating pressures of the twentieth century. One of the disturbing features of the current situation in Iran is that it tends to reinforce precisely those conceptions of Islam which have caused the greatest harm to East-West relations. It is, after all, not a group of Muslim extremists who are committing the atrocities in Iran, but the entire ecclesiastical leadership of what is represented as a model Islamic society. Nor has there been the protest from Muslim nations and institutions that can be confidently expected from other religious communities when factions among them violate their religions' moral standards. This silence from the Muslim world is one of the most unfortunate features of the Bahá'í persecution; it reinforces the false impression that what is being done is an expression of Islam's real nature. The long-term effects of this massive miseducation of large segments of mankind are incalculable.

International Intervention

THE CONTRAST with the anti-Bahá'í pogroms in the nineteenth century is dramatic. In the past, small segments of the public in one or two Western countries would learn, from the isolated dispatches of consular officials, of atrocities committed against Persian Bahá'ís weeks or even months earlier.¹⁸⁷ The possibilities for international intervention were even more limited, consisting of no more than occasional diplomatic protests from European governments with spe-

186. "The success of this coverage (i.e., journalistic, government, and media coverage of Islam, in the West) can be attributed to the political influence of those people and institutions producing it rather than necessarily to truth and accuracy. . . . The result has been the triumph not just of a particular knowledge of Islam but rather of a particular interpretation which, however, has neither been unchallenged nor impervious to the kinds of questions asked by unorthodox, inquiring minds." Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*, p. 161.

187. Momen provides a particularly helpful window on this period, *ibid.*, chapters 14, 15, 17-20, *passim*.

cial interests in Persia. Even the beliefs for which the victims were suffering persecution tended to be seriously distorted because of reliance on partisan sources in Persia or as a consequence of superficial and often chauvinistic attitudes toward such questions in Western circles.¹⁸⁸

The two factors which have dramatically altered the response which such persecution arouses today are the emergence of an international system of values that condemns the violation of human rights, and the fact that the victims of the current persecution in Iran are members of a multicultural community which is now well established in most parts of the world. The first of these two developments, which began to take definite shape in the operations of agencies connected with the League of Nations,¹⁸⁹ was given an enormous impetus by the worldwide revulsion which the Nazi holocaust of the Jews and other captive peoples aroused, following World War II. This reaction produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was subsequently given practical effect through the adoption of the two Covenants on the subject.¹⁹⁰

The capacity of these measures to compel offending governments to comply with the accepted requirements falls far short of assuring practical relief for most of the victims of human rights violations, but the handling of the current Bahá'í case is an impressive illustration of the integrity with which the system operates and its promise for the future. Lacking the size of membership which might itself carry weight with influential nations and precluded by its own principles from engaging in political agitation,

the Bahá'í community sought to utilize the United Nations system, to the fullest extent possible, along the lines provided for in the conventions. The results have been impressive. Despite intense efforts by the Iranian government, the Bahá'í case has moved inexorably through the various levels of the human rights system, building up a virtually unanswerable body of documentary evidence and gathering around it a series of formal resolutions unequivocally condemning Iran as guilty of violating its international commitments.¹⁹¹ A striking feature of the process has been the success of the Bahá'í community in attracting support from Third World nations, as well as from Western countries.¹⁹² Significantly, it is second level countries such as Australia, Canada, and members of the European Economic Community like the Netherlands which have led the protest against persecution of the Bahá'ís. The case has not, therefore, become confused with the political conflict between Iran and the United States.¹⁹³ While this succession of hearings has been taking place, the subject has also received extensive publicity in the media, particularly international news agencies, a sign of the extent to which concern for human rights commands support among large segments of the general population.

The Bahá'í community is convinced that it is only this constant pressure and the unwavering spotlight of international scrutiny which have, so far, prevented a tragedy of appalling dimensions in Iran. There is considerable evidence that appears to support this view. When one considers

the brutality of conditions inside Iran and the apparent lack of moral restraint among the country's leaders, the relatively small number of Bahá'í killings which have so far taken place is striking.¹⁹⁴ Another suggestive fact is the marked concern of the Iranian regime to conceal its mistreatment of its Bahá'í citizens, in contrast to the publicity freely given to the suppression of political groups like the Mujáhedín. Iranian spokesmen at the United Nations and at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva have repeatedly denied that the Bahá'í community is being persecuted, have sought by every means in their power to avoid the case being considered, and have reacted in a highly intemperate fashion when confronted with evidence which they have been unable to refute.¹⁹⁵ The elaborate rationale developed to explain away the faith's existence further underlines the regime's great unease with the subject. An adequate assessment of the connection between international intervention and the unexpected degree of restraint being shown in Iran will have to wait until historians can study the documents of the period.

The Bahá'í Response

WHATEVER SUCH STUDIES eventually reveal, it is apparent that the nature of the Bahá'í community has been as important a factor in developing pressure on the Iranian regime as has the existence of the U.N. Human Rights system. When the anti-Bahá'í pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries occurred, the victims could call on the assistance of only small, isolated groups of fellow believers in a few Western countries. In recent decades, as the Bahá'í Faith has spread throughout the world, a highly organized international community has developed around it. This community sees itself and its faith as the real targets of the attacks

directed against its membership in Iran. Consequently, the experience has served to galvanize the membership into a concerted effort to expose the situation and to mobilize world opinion.

The existence of a unified Bahá'í administrative structure operating at both national and local levels, and responsive to the authority of the faith's central governing body in Haifa, has made it possible to coordinate these international efforts and to respond rapidly to new developments. No doubt, the community's good working relationship with the agencies of the United Nations, where it holds consultative status as a Non-Governmental Organization, has helped greatly, as has the Bahá'í record of strict adherence to the faith's principles of obedience to civil government and noninvolvement in partisan politics. Throughout the world, hundreds of Bahá'í delegations, native to the countries concerned and representing Bahá'í institutions incorporated there, have systematically called on legislators, senior civil servants, academics, influential journalists, and other leaders of thought to plead their case. A flood of literature on the Iranian situation has been published in key languages, containing photographs, photostats of Iranian government documents, translations of the latter, reports on relevant United Nations hearings, and carefully reasoned explanations of the central issues. Arrangements have been made for Bahá'ís who have escaped from Iran to appear on national and local television in many parts of the world, and to give interviews to press and radio, exposing the conditions in their homeland. In New York and Geneva, the offices of the Bahá'í International Community have painstakingly prepared materials for the agencies of the U.N. Human Rights System and have appeared at the various hearings, in order to plead their case. One of the manifestations of this concern which historians will doubtless find especially impressive is the mass of materials — briefs, newspaper articles, resolutions by municipal councils, letters of sympathy from other citizens' groups, and printed programs of public meetings — all of it generated by the vigorous

188. *Ibid.*, chapter 26.

189. The Bahá'ís appealed to the League, in connection with the seizure of the house of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád, in 1928. Since Iraq was at that time a mandated territory under the supervision of the League, the object of the appeal was to secure recognition of the Bahá'í right to the possession of one of the faith's own shrines. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 356-61.

190. The two Covenants deal, respectively, with civil and political rights and with social, economic, and cultural rights. They were adopted in 1966 and came into effect in 1976, when the required number of States had formally adhered to them.

191. See *Bahá'ís in Iran*, pp. 27-31, 61, 66, 68.

192. Among States which have spoken in support of the community at the Commission on Human Rights, for example, are several from Africa and Central America.

193. Although the United States did not itself begin to take any major initiatives in the Bahá'í case until 1983, its delegations supported resolutions put together by other nations, when these reached the agendas of the Third Committee of the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights. The Soviet Union likewise took no initiative in the case, moving from a position in which both it and its East Bloc allies initially supported Iran, to one in which they first abstained and then began endorsing the resolutions.

194. The figure is in sharp contrast, for example, to the many thousands of Mujáhedín who have been killed in consequence of the efforts of the political underground to overthrow the regime.

195. See "Iran: le deuxième Satan," *L'Express*, May 12-19, 1983.

efforts of thousands of local Bahá'í communities in many lands.

Iranian Efforts at Rebuttal

THE BAHÁ'ÍS' EFFORTS to arouse understanding and support for their plight have been aided by the attitude adopted by the Iranian regime itself. The Islamic Revolution initially enjoyed widespread international sympathy and, in some quarters, warm admiration. This goodwill has been steadily squandered over the past five years, in consequence of the regime's gross abuse of its domestic powers and its reckless disregard of the opinions of the rest of humanity. Its handling of the Bahá'í issue is merely a case in point. Repeatedly, Iran's diplomatic representatives have had to be cautioned at various hearings of United Nations agencies about abusive responses to courteous and appropriate inquiries regarding the human rights provisions of their country's constitution.¹⁹⁶ References to the documentary evidence of persecution have been met, not merely with denunciations of the complainants, but by gratuitous attacks on those whose responsibility it has been to pursue the investigation. Even bodies made up of independent jurists and human rights specialists, such as the Sub-Commission on the Protection of Minorities and the Human Rights Committee, have been treated in this fashion.¹⁹⁷ The effect can only have been to leave the strong impression that the Iranian government does not have any meaningful defense to offer.

The impression is reinforced by the regime's efforts to articulate its position in published statements. At the 36th Session (1983) of the

196. See, for example, the statement on this subject by the Netherlands' delegation at the debate on the Covenants on Human Rights, 37th Session of the General Assembly, November 18, 1982.

197. "Mr. President, distinguished members: . . . Your attitude towards our people's revolution shall remain in history as one of the most shameful violations of the true rights of people. . . ." "What on earth gives you the right to ask any questions?" (Delegate of Iran, reporting on Iran's compliance with its commitments under the Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, 16th Session of Human Rights Committee, July, 1982.)

Sub-Commission on the Protection of Minorities, the Iranian government released a booklet entitled *Baha'ism: Its Origins and Its Role*, which it has since distributed widely in the U.N. system.¹⁹⁸ The central theme is the argument already cited that the founding of the Bahá'í Faith in the nineteenth century was a conspiracy by the Russian and British empires and that the current "aggrandizing [of] the Bahá'í issue" represents an attempt "to overwhelm public opinion and to scar the holy countenance of the Islamic Revolution."¹⁹⁹ The booklet further develops this thesis, adducing as supporting evidence quotations from various Bahá'í publications. The bulk of the presentation, however, consists of a collection of "Exhibits," most of them allegedly recovered from SAVAK files, purporting to expose political ties between the Bahá'í community, on the one hand, and both the Pahlavi regime and the State of Israel, on the other.

Of the quotations from Bahá'í literature, it is sufficient to note that a courtesy call at a Bahá'í shrine in Israel by the president of that country and his wife, humanitarian interventions by European diplomatic representatives in Iran during various anti-Bahá'í pogroms, and even a conventional telegram of condolence from King George V on the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 are advanced as evidence of a political conspiracy.²⁰⁰ The "SAVAK exhibits" are even less helpful to the regime's efforts to build its case. They purport to represent confidential reports by agents of the secret police (e.g., "H7") who had managed to infiltrate the Bahá'í community during the regime of Muhammad Rezá Pahlavi to spy on its activities.²⁰¹ Prominent Bahá'ís are quoted as hailing the two Pahlavi shahs as converts to the Bahá'í Faith, as celebrating military

198. P.O. Box 85567, The Hague, The Netherlands, 53 pp.

199. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

200. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 7-9, 10.

201. Assuming that such reports are not merely present-day fabrications, it is apparent from the text that the agents in question had represented themselves to the Bahá'í community as believers and had been duly enrolled. No photostats of original documents are provided by the compilers of the booklet.

victories of the "dear Jewish force" (presumably the Israeli Army), and as announcing instructions "from America and London" to "offend the Islamic nations as far as possible" by promoting Western fashions. They are also pictured as confiding to their fellow believers the startling information that "the atom [bomb] is made by Bahá'í hands."²⁰² When one appreciates that the original versions of these reports were written by SAVAK's agents from the *Tablígát-i-Islámí* (i.e., by the *Hujjatíyyih*) and that it is the *Hujjatíyyih* "Research Centre on Baha'ism" in Qom which supplies the present regime with its documentation on Bahá'í issues, the booklet's argument becomes ludicrous: the *Hujjatíyyih* quote themselves, in their earlier incarnation as SAVAK spies, as the authority for their own arguments, and necessarily falsify their original reports in order to please their present-day collaborators. The booklet appears, in fact, to have been compiled by different groups of people, without either coordination or even consultation. The sections which describe in detail SAVAK's spying on Bahá'ís and its suspicions about Bahá'í activities are incongruously set beside other sections which assert that "the major part of the organization of the Shah's damned rule, particularly SAVAK, was managed by Bahá'ís."²⁰³ One would not have to have a particularly deep knowledge of the events to which such statements allude to recognize that they are a malicious concoction, put together in an inept and slovenly fashion with little respect for those whose opinions the presentation was designed to influence.

Consolidation of the Bahá'í Community

THE EFFECTS of the persecution on the internal life of the Bahá'í community may prove, in the long run, to be even more significant than its members' success in attracting outside support for their cause. When it entered the present

crisis, the community had just passed through an extended period of rapid growth around the world, particularly in developing lands.²⁰⁴ Even in industrial countries, where the faith had long been established, the multiplication of Bahá'í communities in recent years has been a dramatic phenomenon. This expansion produced a membership drawn from a great variety of races, cultures, and social backgrounds, all held together solely by devotion to the faith's founder and to his teachings. It would be difficult to envisage anything more certain to awaken a sense of solidarity in this heterogeneous body of people than the collective experience of defending their faith and their coreligionists against what is perceived as a brutal and totally unprovoked attack.

The experience has been enormously heightened by the fact that it appears as a replay of the spiritual drama in which the community was born over a hundred years ago. Not only are the locales the same, but the persecutors are the heirs of the same ecclesiastical élite who slew the Báb and 20,000 of his early followers and who persecuted Bahá'u'lláh to the end of his life.²⁰⁵ The motivation, the anti-Bahá'í polemic, and the accounts of sadistic mistreatment of women and children are all powerfully reminiscent of the early records left by Western diplomatic observers.²⁰⁶ Even more does the spirit with which present-day Iranian Bahá'ís are meeting their tests evoke these memories. In effect, the persecution currently taking place in the Islamic Republic is dramatizing for Bahá'ís everywhere the moral principles and sacred history with which they have, in varying degrees, identified themselves. Belief thus becomes experiential, particularly so for those individuals and communities who have taken a direct part in the struggle to protect what is dear to them.

This process of consolidation is an inner one which cannot itself be measured, but the occasions it creates are highly suggestive.

204. *Seven Year Plan*, pp. 79-108.

205. See pp. 7-13 above.

206. *Momen* includes a number of such accounts.

202. Exhibits 17, 19, 20, 33.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Throughout the Bahá'í world, countless memorial services are held to commemorate the lives of those dying in Iran as martyrs for their beliefs. The stories of the latter, their photographs, reproductions of their last messages to their families, poems written by them and memoirs contributed by their friends are published in the many Bahá'í news organs. Children are named after them, teaching and service projects are undertaken in their honour, and financial sacrifices are made as tributes to their memories. Towns in other countries are "twinning" with counterparts in Iran, and goals of the international plan are adopted in order to compensate for the disabilities which restrict the efforts of Iranian Bahá'ís. Summer and winter schools include special sessions on current events in Iran, studied against the background of the heroic days of the faith's origins. Several popular books have been written by Bahá'ís, whose perspective on the persecution can be appreciated from the following reference in one of them to the destruction of the Báb's house in Shíráz. The mob had burned an orange tree the Báb had planted in the courtyard:

Don't they know that they really haven't cut down that orange tree at all? I, personally, have at least seven friends in North America who right now are eating oranges from the trees they have grown from the seeds of that orange tree planted by the Báb in Shiraz. There are hundreds more. Pilgrims from everywhere have taken home oranges and planted seeds from that tree. Don't the authorities in Iran know that *tomorrow*, if access to Iran were permitted, black, yellow, red, brown and white Bahá'ís could fly in from all over the world, and plant *a whole row* of orange trees all round the city of Shiraz?²⁰⁷

One of the developments which has been particularly important in providing Western Bahá'ís with intimate access to the ordeal in Iran is the program to settle Iranian Bahá'ís in lands where they were temporarily stranded by the outbreak of the revolution or to which they subse-

207. William Sears, *A Cry From the Heart*, p. 78.

quently escaped. An example is the arrangement which the Bahá'í community of Canada has been able to make with the Canadian government, permitting them to sponsor the immigration of a thousand Iranian Bahá'ís over the past eighteen months.²⁰⁸ Through the assistance of local Bahá'í groups, the new arrivals have been settled in nearly one hundred and forty communities across Canada.

The massive effort to defend the Iranian Bahá'ís and to vindicate the name of the faith has also provided an unexpected opportunity to exercise the network of national and local institutions and the various international agencies. The structure has been painstakingly erected over the past several decades primarily as an instrument for the accomplishment of the plan of expansion conceived by the faith's founders. The community's dramatic growth is a tribute to its effectiveness. The demand for sudden mobilization created by the Iranian crisis, however, and for rapid and coordinated responses as the crisis has unfolded, has tested administrative capacities which large segments of the Bahá'í community must have been only dimly aware of possessing: capacities to argue a case with appropriate government agencies, to organize a systematic publicity campaign, or to cope with the needs of stranded Iranian Bahá'ís, many of them despoiled of everything they had possessed.

In short, an assault which could have been devastating shows, instead, every sign of galvanizing the victims and, ironically, of advancing precisely those concerns which it was intended to inhibit. This is, no doubt, an effect which students of religious history would have felt entirely safe in predicting. The adage that the blood of

208. The agreement was signed in October 1981. Since then, the Canadian government has further identified Iranian Bahá'ís as a class of persons deserving special humanitarian consideration under the government's own refugee quota. The United States has informally accorded special consideration to Iranian Bahá'ís seeking admission to that country under its special humanitarian program for Iranian refugees. A number of other countries have acknowledged that Iranian Bahá'ís, as a group, are victims of persecution in their homeland, and have accorded them temporary residence visas, pending the outcome of events in Iran.

martyrs is the seed of faith is one that seems bent on perennially demonstrating its validity. What is surprising is that the leaders of Shí'ih Islam, whose own faith is, par excellence, the religion of

martyrdom and who could be expected to have a professional appreciation of the dynamics of the phenomenon, should show such little awareness of the likely consequences of their actions.

VI.

The Case of the Iranian Bahá'ís: A Study in Religious Persecution

THE EXPERIENCE of the Bahá'ís of Iran is a classic case of the violation of human rights produced by religious intolerance. The series of isolated attacks, efforts at ostracism, and acts of formalized discrimination which link the pogroms of the mid-nineteenth century with those taking place today under the Islamic Republic form a single continuum. The dynamics of the process arise out of the violent rejection by fundamentalist Muslims of the idea that a new religious system can come into existence after the passing of the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century A.D. Throughout the political upheavals and constitutional changes of the past 140 years, this fixed theological attitude has been used to justify repeated attempts to uproot the Bahá'í Faith in the land of its origin.

The persons who must accept the primary responsibility for the resulting catalogue of crimes against humanity are the Shí'ih clergy. It was members of this caste who instigated the massacres of the 1850s and who incited each of the various outbreaks during the succeeding decades. When the fires of religious hatred began to wane after World War I, it was the 'ulamá who rekindled them and who assured that they were kept burning by propaganda in the mosques and seminaries and by discriminatory legislation during the Pahlavi period. So great was the mullahs' obsession with the Bahá'í issue that they sacrificed Iranian national interests in the economic and political fields, in return for a free hand from the Pahlavi State to carry out the attacks of the 1950s and 1960s against the Bahá'í minority. Today, with complete political power in their hands, the Shí'ih clergy pursue their vendetta directly as justices of the Supreme Court, cabinet ministers, government functionaries, judges of the revolutionary tribunals, and the effective "block wardens" who supervise the minute

details of public life. Such total power must entail, as they pointed out about the late Shah, total responsibility for whatever has ensued.

The argument that the current persecution is a reaction against alleged Bahá'í political activity does not survive serious examination. In no single case has an Islamic tribunal which sentenced a Bahá'í to death, produced evidence of political involvement with the previous regime or of contact with the foreign espionage organizations whose interests the victim was alleged to have served. Nor can an independent observer accept the charge that the Iranian Bahá'ís were a protected social élite under the Pahlavis. Excluded from the protections granted by the imperial constitution to the members of all other religious minorities, denied the right to conduct some of the elementary practices associated with the religious life of a community, exposed to endless harassments from Muslim fundamentalists and to pillaging by officials, and often condemned to watch helplessly as their holy places and cemeteries were desecrated, the Bahá'í community in Iran survived only because of its inherent strengths. Whatever economic, educational, or professional success members of the community enjoyed was achieved despite, not because of, the Pahlavi State's policies towards Bahá'ís.

There is an ironic addendum. If political support of the two Pahlavi shahs or the enjoyment of a favoured position conferred by it are blameworthy, such charges may eventually be brought with compelling force against Iran's Shí'ih hierarchy. The persons who persuaded Rezá Shah to establish the Pahlavi monarchy in 1925 and who played a key role in restoring his son to power when he was temporarily overthrown by democratic forces in 1953 were leading Shí'ih 'ulamá. The most respected ayatollahs in the land hailed

the Pahlavis as agents of God and their military forces as the "Army of God." One must assume that, according to constitutional requirements, all members of Pahlavi cabinets during those sixty years were Shí'ih Muslims. While certain Shí'ih institutions were the object of the regime's intermittent efforts at attrition, Shí'ih Islam enjoyed the position of a state religion in Pahlavi Iran, compelling submission by all segments of the population to certain of its beliefs and observances. Even before the land distribution program began, Shí'ih clergy and organizations of all kinds accepted generous funding from the Pahlavi State and some, like the Hujjatíyyih, were eager agents of the regime in spying on their fellow citizens, religious minorities, and political groups alike. Sooner or later, this record is likely to come under review by the Iranian people. Given the intensity of the political debate currently going on and the accompanying climate of violence, this review may prove to be very searching indeed.

It is a striking coincidence that the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran has broken out anew just as the community of nations is considering formal measures to protect religious rights. The two Covenants adopted in 1966 and brought into force in 1976, when they were ratified by a sufficient number of states, dealt respectively with civil and political rights; and with economic, social, and cultural rights.²⁰⁹ Efforts to extend these provisions to deal specifically with questions of religion and belief were long frustrated because certain blocs of nations were opposed either to shoring up the position of religion in society or to providing protection for religious minorities. Nevertheless, after two decades of protracted discussion and patient pressure, the 36th Session of the General Assembly finally voted, on November 25, 1981, to adopt

209. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights both make specific reference to "religious rights and practices," but it has long been felt that the complexity of the subject requires a specific treatment in a separate instrument, in order to give effect to the necessary provisions.

a Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.²¹⁰ The document was drafted by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and was submitted to the General Assembly with the sponsorship of the Economic and Social Council. Although lacking the force of the two Covenants, the Declaration is considered important in generating international public opinion in support of the issue of religious rights. It also creates the basis for continuing attention to the subject by the Third Committee of the General Assembly.

The situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran is a classic instance of the kind of violation of human rights which the Declaration is intended to address. As a result, the Declaration starts as an immediate reference point for discussions of the Third Committee and other human rights agencies, and the Bahá'í case is reinforced by its special relevancy to current United Nations concerns. The coincidence will no doubt ultimately work to the advantage of both. In the short term, however, the prospect is extremely bleak. Even if the Declaration had the character of one of the Covenants, buttressed by the adherence of a sufficient number of states, it would still be inadequate to provide the effective protection which the Bahá'ís of Iran require. One of the central teachings of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith is that international peace and the protection of the rights of man require the establishment of a world government with its own tribunals and police force. The present situation of his own community provides a dramatic illustration of his meaning. Given the fact, however, that it has taken two world wars to produce the degree of receptivity necessary for the establishment of even the limited degree of international order represented by the United Nations Organization, it is clear that short-term help for Iran's Bahá'ís must come from some other source.

210. The two chairmen of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights, which conducted the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the Declaration, were Ambassador Yvon Beaulne of Canada and Judge Abdoulaye Diéye of Senegal.



Interview in *Kayhán* (September 21, 1983) with Attorney General Siyyid Hossein Moussavi-Tabrizí, announcing the formal ban on all Bahá'í religious and charitable institutions.

The situation, as this monograph is being written, continues to deteriorate daily. On August 29, 1983, Iran's Prosecutor General announced the formal banning of all Bahá'í religious institutions in the country, and declared membership in them or service to them to be criminal offenses.²¹¹ From the context, some observers believe that, in addition to the continuing religious fanaticism involved, the Bahá'ís are being made scapegoats in the worsening political conflict between the various factions in the Islamic movement. At the same time as the government launched its vigorous campaign against the Hujjatíyyih's hoarding activities, it was suddenly announced that revolutionary guards had arrested a Bahá'í named Azíz Dehqání-Tafti on a charge of hoarding second-hand automobile parts. The collection proved to represent no more than the inventory of a medium-sized automotive retail business, but the incident was hailed in the popular press as an example of "economic sabotage" by groups opposed to the State.

The ban on the Bahá'í institutions was announced a week or two later, and the Attorney General took the occasion to attack Bahá'ís and other groups whom he blamed for the deepening economic ills of the nation. For the first time, the Hujjatíyyih were accused by name and were warned that the authorities would not permit them to resume organized activities until they could satisfy the government of their innocence of the activities charged. This was followed by a frontal assault on the Anjuman in the pages of the leading Tehran daily, *Ettelá'át*. From August 31 through October 11, 1983, the government under-

211. The statement of the Attorney General, as published in *Kayhán*, September 21, 1983, purported to exempt the private practice of the Bahá'í Faith from the ban: "If a Bahá'í himself performs his religious acts in accordance with his own beliefs, such a man will not be bothered by us, provided he does not invite others to the Bahá'í Faith, does not teach, does not form assemblies, does not give news to others, and has nothing to do with the administration." Ironically, and unintentionally, this statement represents the first time in Iranian history that any Iranian government has admitted that the Bahá'í Faith is, in fact, a religion. (See illustration previous page.)

took a massive exposé of the activities of the Hujjatíyyih, in a series of major articles. The series brings together all of the accusations against the Hujjatíyyih which had formerly been made behind closed doors and which have been reviewed here.

Faced with the problem of explaining why an organization (the Hujjatíyyih) which had allegedly been created by Western powers as a political catspaw should have devoted its energies primarily to trying to destroy a religious minority (the Bahá'ís) who were supposed to be serving the same ends, the writer of the article advanced a startling suggestion — the aim of the Western powers was to distract high-minded and progressive Muslim youth from an interest in Islamic revolutionary ideas. The Hujjatíyyih achieved this aim by involving these youth in attacks on Bahá'ís and the latter cooperated (so the articles explicitly state) by letting themselves be so attacked.²¹²

Immediately upon learning of the ban on their institutions, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran dissolved all local Bahá'í assemblies throughout the country, and then announced its own formal dissolution.²¹³ In an open letter to the government, some 2,000 copies of which were audaciously distributed by hand to the ministries, the press, and other public agencies, the National Spiritual Assembly reviewed the history of Bahá'í civil obedience throughout the various changes of regime, pointed out that the abuses to which Bahá'ís are being subjected violate Iranian law and the national constitution, and appealed to the regime to keep its own promises that Bahá'ís, as individuals, would be permitted to practice their faith in the privacy of their own homes.²¹⁴ This promise had been explicitly reiterated by the Prosecutor General in the statement which banned Bahá'í community life.

212. The series inadvertently provide interesting glimpses into the history of the behind-the-scenes power struggle in the Islamic regime.

213. For the full text of this statement, see Appendix.

214. For the text of this letter, see Appendix.

The value of these latter assurances was demonstrated when a new wave of Bahá'í arrests followed immediately on the heels of the ban.²¹⁵ The majority of the victims were people who had formerly been members of the now dissolved institutions. One can only conclude that the authorities are making use of the ban as a legal device to sweep up large numbers of prominent believers and to charge them, retroactively, with crimes against the State. This conclusion has been reinforced in recent weeks by horrifying stories indicating that many of those imprisoned are being subjected to torture, in the endless campaign to force them to recant their faith and to terrorize their families and friends. This is an

ominous development, apart entirely from the human suffering involved. It has long been evident that the kinds of pressures hitherto adopted have failed to achieve the desired recantations, and that the Shí'ih clergy are now prepared to go much further. If, as seems certain, these efforts likewise fail to break down the victims and induce a similar reaction from the mass of the Bahá'ís of Iran, the mullahs' only remaining option would seem to be to carry out the large-scale executions which some of the most fanatical among them have long threatened. So deliberate an outrage would face those nations who have the capacity to bring intensive pressure on Iran with an entirely new kind of challenge.

215. The Bahá'í International Community estimates that upwards of 700 Bahá'ís are held in various prisons throughout Iran, as of February 1984.

Appendix

An Open Letter on the Banning of Bahá'í Religious Institutions from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran

(Translated from Persian)

12 Shahrivar 1362

[September 3, 1983]

RECENTLY THE ESTEEMED Prosecutor General of the Islamic Revolution of the Country, in an interview that was published in the newspapers,¹ declared that the continued functioning of the Bahá'í religious and spiritual administration is banned and that membership in it is considered to be a crime. This declaration has been made after certain unjustified accusations have been levelled against the Bahá'í community of Iran and after a number of its members—ostensibly for imaginary and fabricated crimes but in reality merely for the sake of their beliefs—have been either executed, or arrested and imprisoned. The majority of those who have been imprisoned have not yet been brought to trial.

The Bahá'í community finds the conduct of the authorities and the judges bewildering and lamentable—as indeed would any fair-minded observer who is unblinded by malice. The authorities are the refuge of the people; the judges in pursuit of their work of examining and ascertaining the truth and facts in legal cases devote years of their lives to studying the law and, when uncertain of a legal point, spend hours poring over copious tomes in order to cross a *t* and dot an *i*. Yet these very people consider themselves to be justified in brazenly bringing

false accusations against a band of innocent people, without fear of the Day of Judgment, without even believing the calumnies they utter against their victims, and having exerted not the slightest effort to investigate to any degree the validity of the charges they are making. “Me-thinks they are not believers in the Day of Judgment.”²

The honorable Prosecutor has again introduced the baseless and fictitious story that Bahá'ís engage in espionage, but without producing so much as one document in support of the accusation, without presenting proof in any form, and without any explanation as to what is the mission in this country of this extraordinary number of “spies”: what sort of information they obtain and from what sources? Whither do they relay it, and for what purpose? What kind of “spy” is an eighty-five year old man from Yazd who has never set foot outside his village? Why do these alleged “spies” not hide themselves, conceal their religious beliefs and exert every effort to penetrate, by every stratagem, the Government’s information centers and offices? Why has no Bahá'í “spy” been arrested anywhere else in the world? How could students, housewives, innocent young girls, and old men and women, such as those blameless Bahá'ís who have recently been delivered to the gallows in Iran, or who have become targets for the darts of prejudice and enmity, be “spies”? How could the Bahá'í farmers of the villages of Afús, Chígán,

the Fort of Malak (near Isfahán), and those of the village of Núk in Bírjand, be “spies”? What secret intelligence documents have been found in their possession? What espionage equipment has come to hand? What “spying” activities were engaged in by the primary school children who have been expelled from their schools? . . .

All the other accusations made against the Bahá'ís by the honorable Prosecutor of the Revolution are similarly groundless. He brands the Bahá'í community with accusations of subversion and corruption. For example, on the basis of a manifestly forged interview, the falsity of which has been dealt with in a detailed statement, he accuses the Bahá'í community of hoarding, an act which its members would consider highly reprehensible. . . . Yes, such allegations of corruption and subversion are similar to those hurled against us at the time of the Anglican case in Isfahán when this oppressed community was accused of collaboration with foreign agents, as a result of which seven innocent Bahá'ís of Yazd were executed. Following this the falsity of the charges was made known and the Prosecutor announced the episode to be the outcome of a forgery.

Bahá'ís are accused of collecting contributions and transferring sums of money to foreign countries.³ How strange! If Muslims, in accordance with their sacred and respected spiritual beliefs, send millions of túmáns to Karbalá, Najaf and Jerusalem, or to other Muslim holy places outside Iran, to be spent on the maintenance and upkeep of the Islamic sacred shrines, it is considered very praiseworthy; but if a Bahá'í—even during the time in which the transfer of foreign currency was allowed—sends a negligible amount for his international community to be used for the repair and maintenance of the holy places of his faith, it is considered that he has committed an unforgivable sin and it is counted as proof that he has done so in order to strengthen other countries.

3. The reference is to the sending of financial contributions to the Bahá'í International Centre, located in Haifa, Israel, where the principal shrines of the Bahá'í Faith are located.

Accusations of this nature are many but all are easy to investigate. If just and impartial people and God-fearing judges will only do so, the falsity of these spurious accusations will be revealed in case after case. The Bahá'í community emphatically requests that such accusations be investigated openly in the presence of juries composed of judges and international observers so that, once and for all, the accusations may be discredited and their repetition prevented.

The basic principles and beliefs of the Bahá'ís have been repeatedly proclaimed and set forth in writing during the past five years. Apparently these communications, either by deliberate design or by mischance, have not received any attention, otherwise accusations such as those described above would not have been repeated by one of the highest and most responsible authorities. This in itself is a proof that the numerous communications referred to were not accorded the attention of the leaders; therefore, we mention them again. . . .

Also, Bahá'ís, in accordance with their exalted teachings, are duty bound to be obedient to their government. Elucidating this subject, Shoghi Rabbani says: “The people of Bahá are required to obey their respective governments, and to demonstrate their truthfulness and good will towards the authorities. . . . Bahá'ís, in every land and without any exception, should . . . be obedient and bow to the clear instructions and the declared decrees issued by the authorities. They must faithfully carry out such directives.”

Bahá'í organizations have no aim except the good of all nations and do not take any steps that are against the public good. Contrary to the conception it may create in the mind because of the similarity in name, it does not resemble the current organizations of political parties; it does not interfere in political affairs; and it is the safeguard against the involvement of Bahá'ís in subversive political activities. Its high ideals are “to improve the characters of men; to extend the scope of knowledge; to abolish ignorance and prejudice; to strengthen the foundations of true

1. Siyyid Hossein Moussavi-Tabrizí, in a statement published in the Tehran daily, *Kayhán*, Sept 21, 1983.

2. A major 14th century Persian poet.

religion in all hearts; to encourage self-reliance, and discourage false imitation; . . . to uphold truthfulness, audacity, frankness, and courage; to promote craftsmanship and agriculture; . . . to educate, on a compulsory basis, children of both sexes; to insist on integrity in business transactions; to lay stress on the observance of honesty and piety; . . . to acquire mastery and skill in the modern sciences and arts; to promote the interests of the public; . . . to obey outwardly and inwardly and with true loyalty the regulations enacted by state and government; . . . to honor, to extol and to follow the example of those who have distinguished themselves in science and learning. . . .” And again, “. . . to help the needy from every creed or sect, and to collaborate with the people of the country in all welfare services.”

In brief, whatever the clergy in other religions undertake individually and by virtue of their appointment to their positions, the Bahá'í administration performs collectively and through an elective process.

The statements made by the esteemed Prosecutor of the Revolution do not seem to have legal basis, because in order to circumscribe individuals and deprive them of the rights which have not been denied them by the Constitution, it is necessary to enact special legislation, provided that legislation is not contradictory to the Constitution. It was hoped that the past recent years would have witnessed, on the one hand, the administration of divine justice—a principle promoted by the true religion of Islám and prescribed by all monotheistic religions—and, on the other, and coupled with an impartial investigation of the truths of the Bahá'í Faith, the abolition or at least mitigation of discrimination, restrictions and pressures suffered by Bahá'ís over the past 135 years. Alas, on the contrary because of long-standing misunderstandings and prejudices, the difficulties increased immensely and the portals of calamity were thrown wide open

Many are the pure and innocent lives that have been snuffed out; many the distinguished heads that have adorned the hangman's noose; and

many the precious breasts that became the targets of firing squads. Vast amounts of money and great quantities of personal property have been plundered or confiscated. Many technical experts and learned people have been tortured and condemned to long-term imprisonment and are still languishing in dark dungeons, deprived of the opportunity of placing their expertise at the service of the Government and the nation. Numerous are the self-sacrificing employees of the Government who spent their lives in faithful service but who were dismissed from work and afflicted with poverty and need because of hatred and prejudice. Even the owners of private firms and institutions were prevented from engaging Bahá'ís. Many privately-owned Bahá'í establishments have been confiscated. Many tradesmen have been denied the right to continue working by cancellation of their business licenses. Bahá'í youth have been denied access to education in many schools and in all universities and institutions of higher education. Bahá'í university students abroad are deprived of receiving money for their education, and others who wish to pursue their studies outside Iran have been denied exit permits. Bahá'ís, including the very sick whose only hope for cure was to receive medical treatment in specialized medical centers in foreign lands, have been prevented from leaving the country. Bahá'í cemeteries have been confiscated and bodies rudely disinterred. Numerous have been the days when a body has remained unburied while the bereaved family pleaded to have a permit issued and a burial place assigned so that the body might be decently buried. As of today, thousands of Bahá'ís have been divested of their homes and forced to live as exiles. Many have been driven from their villages and dwelling places and are living as wanderers and stranded refugees in other parts of Iran with no other haven and refuge but the Court of the All-Merciful God and the loving-kindness of their friends and relatives.

It is a pity that the mass media, newspapers and magazines, either do not want or are not allowed to publish any news about the Bahá'í

community of Iran or to elaborate upon what is happening. If they were free to do so and were unbiased in reporting the daily news, volumes would have been compiled describing the inhumane cruelty to and oppression of the innocent. For example, if they were allowed to do so, they would have written that in *Shiráz* seven courageous men and ten valiant women — seven of whom were girls in the prime of their lives — audaciously rejected the suggestion of the religious judge that they recant their faith or, at least, dissemble their belief, and preferred death to the concealment of their faith. The women, after hours of waiting with dried lips, shrouded themselves in their *chádurs*, kissed the noose of their gallows, and with intense love offered up their souls for the One Who proffereth life. The observers of this cruel scene might well ask forgiveness for the murderers at Karbalá, since they, despite their countless atrocities, did not put women to the sword nor harass the sick and infirm.⁴

Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this letter to recount the atrocities inflicted upon the guiltless Bahá'ís of Iran or to answer, one by one, the accusations levelled against them. But let us ask all just and fair-minded people only one question: If, according to the much-publicized statements of the Prosecutor, Bahá'ís are not arrested and executed because of their belief, and are not even imprisoned on that account, how is it that, when a group of them is arrested and each is charged with the same “crime” of “spying”, if one of them recants his belief, he is immediately freed, a photograph of him and a description of his defection are victoriously featured in the newspapers, and respect and glory are heaped upon him? What kind of spying, subversion, illegal accumulation of goods, aggression or conspiracy or other “crime” can it be that is

4. The reference is to the slaying of the Imám Husayn, grandson of the Prophet, by a dissident Muslim faction, on the Plain of Karbila, in the seventh century. The murderers killed the Imám and his male followers but spared the women and children. Commemoration of the event and the mourning related to it corresponds in Shi'ih Islam to that surrounding the crucifixion of Christ in the Christian faith.

capable of being blotted out upon the recantation of one's beliefs? Is this not a clear proof of the absurdity of the accusations?

In spite of all this, the Bahá'í community of Iran, whose principles have been described earlier in this statement, announces the suspension of the Bahá'í organizations throughout Iran, in order to establish its good intentions and in conformity with its basic tenets concerning complete obedience to the instructions of the Government. Henceforth, until the time when, God willing, the misunderstandings are eliminated and the realities are at last made manifest to the authorities, the National Assembly and all local spiritual assemblies and their committees are disbanded, and no one may any longer be designated a member of the Bahá'í Administration.

The Bahá'í community of Iran hopes that this step will be considered a sign of its complete obedience to the Government in power. It further hopes that the authorities—including the esteemed Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution who says that there is no opposition to and no enmity towards individual Bahá'ís, who has acknowledged the existence of a large Bahá'í community and has, in his interview, guaranteed its members the right to live and be free in their acts of worship—will reciprocate by proving their good intentions and the truth of their assurances by issuing orders that pledge, henceforth:

1. To bring to an end the persecutions, arrests, torture and imprisonment of Bahá'ís for imaginary crimes and on baseless pretexts, because God knows—and so do the authorities—that the only “crime” of which these innocent ones are guilty is that of their beliefs, and not the unsubstantiated accusations brought against them;
2. To guarantee the safety of their lives, their personal property and belongings, and their honor;
3. To accord them freedom to choose their residence and occupation and the right of association based on the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic;

4. To restore all the rights which have been taken away from them in accordance with the groundless assertions of the Prosecutor of the Country;
5. To restore to Bahá'í employees the rights denied them by returning them to their jobs and by paying them their due wages;
6. To release from prison all innocent prisoners;
7. To lift the restrictions imposed on the properties of those Bahá'ís who, in their own country, have been deprived of their belongings;
8. To permit Bahá'í students who wish to continue their studies abroad to benefit from the same facilities that are provided to others;
9. To permit those Bahá'í youth who have been prevented from continuing their studies in the country to resume their education;
10. To permit those Bahá'í students stranded abroad who have been deprived of foreign exchange facilities to receive their allowances as other Iranian students do;
11. To restore Bahá'í cemeteries and to permit Bahá'ís to bury their dead in accordance with Bahá'í burial ceremonies;
12. To guarantee the freedom of Bahá'ís to perform their religious rites; to conduct funerals and burials including the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead; to solemnize Bahá'í marriages and divorces, and to carry out all acts of worship and laws and ordinances affecting personal status; because although Bahá'ís are

entirely obedient and subordinate to the Government in the administration of the affairs which are in the jurisdiction of Bahá'í organizations, in matters of conscience and belief, and in accordance with their spiritual principles, they prefer martyrdom to recantation or the abandoning of the divine ordinances prescribed by their faith;

13. To desist henceforth from arresting and imprisoning anyone because of his previous membership in Bahá'í organizations.

Finally, although the order issued by the Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolution was unjust and unfair, we have accepted it. We beseech God to remove the dross of prejudice from the hearts of the authorities so that aided and enlightened by His confirmations they will be inspired to recognize the true nature of the affairs of the Bahá'í community and come to the unalterable conviction that the infliction of atrocities and cruelties upon a pious band of wronged ones, and the shedding of their pure blood, will stain the good name and injure the prestige of any nation or government, for what will, in truth, endure are the records of good deeds, and of acts of justice and fairness, and the names of the doers of good. These will history preserve in its bosom for posterity.

Respectfully,

(signed)

National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of Iran

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The Bahá'í Faith A Summary

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith." His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

Shoghi Effendi

La foi bahá'íe, un aperçu

Les adeptes de Bahá'u'lláh croient que la révélation proclamée par lui est d'origine divine, d'une portée mondiale, d'une vaste envergure, scientifique par sa méthode, humanitaire dans ses principes et dynamique par l'influence qu'elle exerce sur les coeurs et les esprits des hommes. Pour eux, la mission du fondateur de leur religion est de proclamer que la vérité religieuse n'est pas absolue mais relative; que la révélation divine est continuelle et progressive; que les fondateurs de toutes les religions passées, bien qu'ils diffèrent dans les aspects non essentiels de leurs enseignements, « demeurent dans le même tabernacle, s'élèvent au même ciel, sont assis sur le même trône, prononcent les mêmes paroles et proclament la même foi ». La cause de Bahá'u'lláh, ils l'ont déjà démontré, implique le principe de l'unité organique de l'humanité avec lequel elle se trouve identifiée, principe qui représente le but final de toute l'évolution humaine. Ils déclarent que le dernier stade de cette prodigieuse évolution est non seulement nécessaire mais inévitable et qu'il s'approche graduellement; rien d'autre que la puissance céleste qui anime un message divinement ordonné, ne pourra réussir à l'établir.

La religion bahá'íe reconnaît l'unité de Dieu et de ses prophètes; elle soutient le principe de la recherche indépendante de la vérité, condamne toutes les formes de superstitions et de préjugés; elle enseigne que le but fondamental de la religion est de favoriser l'harmonie et la concorde; que la religion doit marcher de pair avec la science et qu'elle constitue la seule et ultime base d'une société pacifique, progressive et bien organisée. Elle inculque le principe d'égalité des droits et des privilèges pour les deux sexes. Elle préconise l'instruction obligatoire; elle abolit les extrêmes de la pauvreté et de la richesse; elle élève le travail accompli dans un esprit de service, au rang d'acte d'adoration; elle recommande l'adoption d'une langue auxiliaire internationale et prévoit les organisations nécessaires à l'établissement et à la préservation d'une paix permanente et universelle.

Shoghi Effendi