

National Consultative Assembly; 13th Term

The 13th National Consultative Assembly was inaugurated on November 12, 1941 with a speech by Iran's new monarch, Shah Mohammad Reza.

This term of national assembly coincided with the occupation of Iran by Allies, security crisis and tribal riots, and shortage of food particularly bread. The military occupation of Iran and the absence of a monarch like Reza Shah had caused many problems like famine, starvation, fuel shortage, and epidemics like typhoid fever, typhus, and cholera.

Of course, the election for this assembly had been held on August 30, 1941 while Reza Shah was still in power. But after Reza Shah stepped down the following month, a new period started in Iran's legislative system. Many opponents called for the annulment of the vote tally. People in Tehran signed a petition demanding that Shah Mohammad Reza nullify the election results. Foroughi had earlier given the nod to this demand; however, he resorted to the Constitution and dismissed the request, citing the presence of Allies' forces in Iran. (Shajiei, 1965: 188)

The parliament was finally inaugurated with 135 MPs whose credentials were endorsed. No MP was elected from the Mahabad constituency and eight seats remained vacant due to resignation or death of MPs. Mirza Hassan Khan Esfandiari, aka Mohtasham as-Saltaneh, remained speaker. The composition of MPs was not different this time and the chamber was dominated by landowners and civil servants (Shajiei, 1965: 181); however, this assembly made up of Reza Shah-selected MPs pursued an approach which was different from what everyone presumed.

After about twenty years, the second lifecycle of political parties and establishments started in Iran. The Assembly comprised four factions – National Unity, Patriotic Party, Azarbaijan (Union) and Justice along with Individuals. (Modir Shanechi, 1996; Abrahamian, 2004: 219)

1. The National Unity faction formed the largest bloc in the assembly, but it did not constitute a majority. They represented a group of aristocrats who showed inclination to the United States. Main members of this bloc were Morteza Qoli Khan Bayat, aka Saham as-Soltan, 9-time Arak MP and leader of faction; Hassan Esfandiary, the speaker; and Seyed Ahmad Behbahani (the son of Constitutionalist Behbahani), the self-declared spokesman of merchants. (Ibid: 220)
2. The Patriotic faction comprised landowners and businesspeople from southern and southwestern Iran. They supported England and wanted Seyed Zia back as prime minister. (Ibid: 221)
3. The Union or Azarbaijan faction comprised landowners from northern Iran and Qajar aristocrats, who favored Russian policies in Iran. Mohammad Vali Farmanfarma and Amir Nosrat Eskandari (a descendant of Fath Ali Shah) supported Ahmad Qavam's prime ministership and favored limited power for the Court. (Ibid: 222)
4. The Justice faction was comprised of the old generation of intellectuals, landowners and high-ranking technocrats (Ibid: 223). Ali Dashti, who led the party, believed that the

Americans could help establish order in the country. Their favorite choice for the post of prime minister was Ali Soheili.

5. The Individual faction members changed the weight of different factions. Their cooperation with different factions influenced decisions adopted in the Assembly.

The term of the 13th Assembly coincided with the prime ministership of Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Ali Soheili and Ahmad Qavam. As factionalism was laid bare in the Assembly, differences came to the limelight and Cabinets did not survive as long as they used to do. Foroughi stepped down on March 2, 1942 after the Assembly approved treaty of unity between Iran and USSR and England, and the minister of justice was impeached. Six days later, Ali Soheili – backed by the Justice Party – took over.

On August 9, 1942, Ahmad Qavam, backed by the Union Party, became prime minister. That happened ten days after Soheili quit. Qavam said he planned to "develop national security, supply pharmaceuticals and food". (Khatami, 2013: 83)

Qavam sought to let US have a toehold in Iran. He also wanted to increase his authority, but most MPs opposed. Backed by the Assembly, the Qavam administration enforced a ban on foodstuff exports, limited banking credit, levied higher taxes on high revenues, rationed food, and adopted anti-hoarding law.

This period was marked by the bread crisis. December 8 and 9, 1942 will never be erased from Iranian's minds. On those days, students at Iranshahr and Darolfonoun schools joined Tehran University students to shout "We Want Bread". They entered the Assembly and attacked MPs in session. A number of them were killed and Qavam's house was looted. Martial law was declared, many were arrested and the Assembly remained closed to December 20 for reparation. (Shajiei, 1998: 194)

On December 24, the Assembly approved the government bill on the press. That revoked the license of all newspapers and magazines, whose managers and editors faced punishment. (Aqeli, 1997: 352)

But the Supreme Cultural Council reestablished the licenses of 35 publications that had been banned by Qavam. They resumed printing in March 1943. (Aqeli, 1998: 322)

As World War II started Iran declared its neutrality not to be dragged into conflict. This position faced harsh reaction from Allied governments, leading to Reza Khan's exile. After that Allies pressured Iran to take position against Germany. On September 9, 1943 the Assembly signed into law a declaration of war on German and the United Front in WWII. (Shajiei, 1965: 159)

The famous Tehran Conference was held in November 1943 to be followed with the Cairo conference without Iran being in attendance. This conference agreed on the Allies' disembarkation in France's Normandy, imposing a defeat on Germany. Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin agreed to leave Iran after the end of the war.

The 13th Assembly approved 140 laws, the most important of which was authorizing Arthur Millspaugh to become Iran's chief treasurer in the Qavam administration. It was the second time

Millspaugh had been named to this post. Meanwhile, Harold Grasham was named head of Iran's Customs.

The Assembly voted in October 1942 in favor of a law on printing 800-million-rial bills in order to supply the needs of Allies. The MPs first opposed, but they finally approved it under fabricated threats. (Kavoshi, 2011: 612)

Under pressure from Britain, wheat delivery to Iran was delayed. As a result, the Assembly delegated its authority on saving bills to the government on November 19, 1942. (Khatami, Ibid: 86)

In return, the Allies agreed to supply 100,000 tonnes of grains to Iran. The Assembly transferred its authority on bill printing to the government on November 19, 1942. (Parliamentary Laws Directorate-General, 1972: 216-234)

The law on treaty of Iran's unity with USSR and Britain, Anti-Hoarding Law, exemption of rice, wheat and alfalfa from customs duties, establishment of Food Ministry, amendments to Press Law, amendments to Conscription Law with regard to custody of parents, law on protecting forests, law on trade between Iran and the US, and the law suspending Martial Law were among other important pieces of legislation adopted in the 13th Assembly. (Ibid and Shajiei, Ibid: 160)

Amid crisis and serious discrepancies with the Qavam administration, the 13th Assembly ended its term on November 23, 1943.

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