

National Consultative Assembly, Third Term

The 3rd National Consultative Assembly was elected three years after the dissolution of the second Assembly. During this three-year gap, the Russians and the British deepened their influence in Iran. The country got loans with a high interest rate from the Russian and the British governments and Iran was forced to award the construction of Jolfa-Tabriz railroad to Russia.

When Ahmad Shah reached the age of puberty, the foundation was laid for the 3rd Assembly and general elections started. An outstanding feature of this round of election was that newspapers made revelations about corrupt election process and irregularities like vote buying. The 3rd Assembly was finally inaugurated on December 6, 1914 with 68 lawmakers in attendance.

This Assembly made amendments to Election Law, specifically targeting the line-up of legislators in terms of social classes and professions. The number of legislators representing businesspeople and guilds had declined from the previous Assembly, but the representatives of landowners and the clergy had grown compared with the previous two assemblies. (Shajiei, 1965: 181)

Meanwhile changes were made to the level of education of lawmakers in the new Assembly. This time, 4% of the MPs were PhD holders, 13% held bachelors' degrees and 13% were Mujtahid (Advanced clerics who were certified to give out Islamic opinions with authority on issues). (Shajiei, 1965: 229)

The share of parties had also changed. In the new Assembly, four political factions were represented: 1. Democrats with 31 deputies 2. Moderates with 29 deputies. A newly established party, known as Board of Scholars led by Hassan Modarres, had 14 representatives and the Independents, who had forged alliance with Democrats, had 20 deputies. In this assembly, Democrats were stronger. Led by Soleyman Mirza, the Democratic Party was determined to probe the government's performance during the three-year break between the second and third assemblies, punish traitors, embark on financial and cultural reforms, and launch conscription.

Moderates were split into two groups of Liberals and Clerics after the 2nd Assembly was dissolved. Both favored gradual reforms, but they held conflicting views towards the World War. (Ettahadieh, 2002: 212-232)

Four Cabinets were formed as long as the 3rd Assembly was in office. Hassan Khan Mostofi al-Mamalek (twice), Mirza Hassan Khan Pir-Nia and Ein ad-Dowleh were the heads of government who won the vote of confidence for their Cabinets. (Masoudi et al, 2014: 70)

The third Assembly convened a total of 79 sessions. Such issues as decentralization of power, financial weakness of government, riots, increased interference of British and Russian governments, and political parties were discussed. The 3rd Assembly refrained from holding open sessions to discuss foreign policy, but they insisted on discussing openly government affairs and even crises in the Cabinet. The legislature faced time limitation, but it managed to vote important and helpful laws: Law calling for the establishment of Ministry of Finance, Real Estate Tax Law, Law banning exit of gold and silver, and Conscription Law which facilitated

National Army establishment. Moreover, the lawmakers cleared Iran's customs of Belgian nationals. (Shajiei, 1965: 143-144)

No later had the third Assembly been inaugurated than World War I started. Britain and Russia called on Iran to declare war on Axis power, but the Iranian government chose to remain neutral. But ignoring Iran's decision, Russia and Britain invaded Iran from north and south. The Russian forces advanced as far as Qazvin. The Iranian government decided to move the capital from Tehran to Isfahan, but was forced by the Russian and British ambassadors to reconsider its decision due to widespread riots in country.

A group of lawmakers moved to the city of Qom where they set up National Defense Committee. Due to the massive presence of legislators in the Qom meeting, the Assembly lost its quorum on November 14, 1915 and it was shut down in less than one year from its inauguration.

The National Defense Committee travelled to Kashan and Isfahan before leaving for Kermanshah which was occupied by Ottoman forces. These lawmakers set up a Provisional National Government. Meantime, the Moderates and Democrats parties were both dissolved due to differences between the government, Nezam us-Saltaneh, Soleyman Mirza, and Democrats.

The war went in the favor of the Allies (Entente powers). Russian troops invaded Western Iran and defeated the Ottomans. The National Government came to end. (Shajiei, 1965: 143 And Abrahamian, 2004: 139)

Almost two years after the 3rd Assembly was dissolved, the Russian forces left Iran following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). However, Britain remained in Iran for three more years until the February 22, 1921 coup orchestrated by Seyed Zia. The 4th Assembly was inaugurated more than five and a half years after the dissolution of the 3rd Assembly.

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