

## **National Consultative Assembly, 17<sup>th</sup> Term**

The election for the 17<sup>th</sup> term of the National Consultative Assembly was held in December 1951. Then prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq appointed a judge at each constituency in order to curb the influence of army commanders and land proprietors. He also replaced all governors.

Mossadeq had sought in vain during the tenure of the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly to amend the electoral law, which banned illiterates from voting, called a halt to legislative election under the pretext of his scheduled show-up in The Hague court of justice. However, his main objective was to stand against the election of monarchists and tribal leaders. The election was not held completely. By trying to keep Court-affiliated candidates from entering parliament, Mossadeq was seeking to turn into reality a law on nationalization of petroleum industry approved by the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly on March 15, 1951. The 17<sup>th</sup> assembly was the only one to have been inaugurated with only half of its total seats, i.e. 79 MPs. Mossadeq skipped the inauguration and wrote a letter declaring the election rigged. He also called on the lawmakers to reject fabricated credentials. Examination of some credentials lasted more than two months. Fifty credentials were approved while 23 others were rejected. (Aqeli, 1991: 743)

The dominant parliamentary blocs in the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly were from two groups: "National Front" and "Monarchists and Conservatives". The National Front faction had 30 members who were affiliated from pro-Mossadeq parties like Iran Party, Toilers, Islam Combatants Society, as well as some independent MPs (Abrahamian, 2004: 331). The interesting point is that there were 11 clerics in this faction (Shajiei, 1965: 181). The other bloc included 49 pro-Britain Iranian land proprietors. The lawmakers in the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly may be categorized from another aspect as follows: The 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly members were comprised of four groups; one group was pro-Mossadeq, one group was inclined towards Ayatollah Abolqasem Kashani, one group was affiliated with the Court and subsequently executed royal orders and a fourth group was independent but led by influential MPs. (Aqeli, 1995: 746)

In addition to parties mentioned here above, outside parliament Tudeh party and Third Force party were active. The Third Force party was a branch of the Toilers Party after Mozaffar Baqaei refused to support Mossadeq. It was led by Khalil Maleki. The monarchists had covertly established National Salvation Committee with the help of Major General Fazlollah Zahedi and were seeking to undermine the government. (Baqeri et al, 2014: 276)

Two important political events marked this round of election. One is the July 20, 1952 uprising and the other one is the coup against the Mossadeq government. On July 5, 1952, MPs voted Mossadeq as prime minister, but the Senate did not endorse him. That triggered protests backed by Ayatollah Kashani. Finally, the Senate was ordered by the Shah to approve Mossadeq's prime ministership. On July 15 Mossadeq demanded that he head the Ministry of War, but the Shah refused and Mossadeq tendered his resignation. Two days later, 40 out of 42 MPs in session (30 National Front MPs had shunned the session) voted Qavam as prime minister (Shajiei, 1993: 271). On July 18, unrest engulfed Tehran and other cities. Ayatollah Kashani released a statement threatening declaration of jihad. The Shah had no option but to sign off Mossadeq's prime

ministership on July 20. The following day, the National Consultative Assembly and the Senate overwhelmingly gave their vote of confidence in Mossadeq as prime minister. After the July 20 uprising, the National Front faction was renamed National Movement. That was 16 months after the success of petroleum industry nationalization. The Assembly described the uprising as a sacred national uprising and its martyrs as national martyrs. The Assembly also adopted a motion ordering the arrest of Qavam and seizure of his assets. (Shajiei, 1965: 270; Zaeim, 1998: 214-215)

Mossadeq reached his goal and started heading the Ministry of War. He named Major General Vosouq as caretaker minister. The Assembly also voted a bill granting the government extraordinary authority for six months. In the aftermath of the July uprising, Tehran Friday Prayers leader Hassan Emami, who was a staunch supporter of the Shah, stepped down as speaker of parliament. He was succeeded by Ayatollah Kashani on August 6, 1952. Kashani also quit shortly after and Dr Moazzami replaced him. One of the major events of this period was the dissolution of the Senate by the National Consultative Assembly. The reason for such a dissolution was that the Senate had overstayed its two-year tenure and the Senators were blocked from entering the Assembly building as of October 24, 1952. In the end, Shah Mohammad Reza signed off on the dissolution of the Senate up to the August 18, 1953 coup. (Baqeri et al, Ibid: 282-283)

In line with his request for the extension of government authority, Mossadeq saw no option but to shut down the Assembly. On August 14, 1953, the National Front MPs resigned en masse to clear the way for the shutdown of the Assembly. Independent MPs stepped down afterwards. Their logic was the opposition MPs' stance. (Avery, 1994: 395)

In order to legalize the dissolution of the Assembly, Mossadeq, backed by Tudeh party, held a referendum on August 9, 1953 to win approval for this purpose. After the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly was dissolved, the Shah dismissed Mossadeq and appointed General Zahedi as prime minister in a bid to prepare the ground for a coup against Mossadeq. However, Mossadeq declared his dismissal illegal and disarmed the Imperial Guard to foil the first coup attempt on August 15. The Shah fled to Baghdad and then flew to Rome. However, three days later, the hooligans-backed Army, the silence of Tudeh party, and the apathy of Mossadeq's supporters, the only national government in Iran was dismissed. The differences between Mossadeq and Kashani were key to the failure of the Mossadeq government (Zaeim, Ibid, 217; Aabrahamian, Ibid: 342-345). The important point is that everyone is in consensus on the interference of the US and British governments in the anti-Mossadeq coup. The Americans feared spread of Communism in Iran while the British were worried for their oil interests. (Wilber, 2003: 153)

Despite all these events, the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly voted 44 laws, the most important of which were as follows: Law granting extraordinary authority to the Mossadeq government for six months, Law on Nationalization of Telecommunications, Law on Establishment of Public Bus Company, Law on Banning Alcoholic Drinks' Trading and Consumption, Law on Termination of the 1927 Iran-Russia Fishing Contract and Nationalization of Fishery in February 1953, and approval of Articles of Association for Iran Telephone Company. (Baqeri et al, Ibid: 288; Shajiei, 1965: 186)

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