

National Consultative Assembly, 2nd Term

The period of Minor Dictatorship began after the shelling of Majlis at the order of Muhammad Ali Shah. A large number of nationalist leaders and members of assembly were imprisoned or killed. Those who survived fled the country. In protest at the Shah's measures, constitutionalists from across the country were united. After seizing important cities like Tabriz, Rasht, Qazvin, and Isfahan, they headed towards the capital Tehran. After three days of fighting, Tehran was occupied by them on July 16, 1909.

After the Tehran conquest, a group of 500 constitutionalists formed a Supreme Assembly. Due to their large number, a 28-member Presiding Board was elected. This assembly carried out the following measures: 1. Dethroning Muhammad Ali Shah and sending him to exile in Russia and naming his 13-year-old son Ahmad Reza to succeed him 2. Executing some supporters of the Shah like Mafakher al-Molk, governor of Tehran, and influential cleric Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri 3. Appointing a viceregent, minister of war, and minister of interior (Abrahamian, 2004: 127)

The Presiding Board also changed the Election Law. Under the new law, the number of lawmakers was cut to 120 and the principle of class-based election was scrapped. The election was held in two rounds. In the first round, each city first elected legislators three times their quota. Then, the final lawmakers were selected in the second round. The number of deputies in Tehran was cut from 60 to 15 while states saw their quota increase to 101. Four seats were given to religious minorities. The Bakhtiari, Qashqai, and Turkmen tribes each had to be representative. Social classes were no longer criteria for the representatives and the condition of financial affordability was reduced from 1,000 tomans to 250 tomans. In case the elector was literate he did not have to meet any title deed obligations. The minimum age for the electees was reduced from 25 to 20. Heresy was no longer an obstacle to voting. (Ettahadieh, 2002: 285-296)

Seventeen months after shelling, the second term of National Assembly started on November 15, 1909. The formation of the second assembly did not happen soon because it was stipulated in the rules of procedure of the first Assembly that Majlis would be established as soon as representatives of Tehran constituency were elected. However, this time it was decided that Majlis be inaugurated after the absolute majority of MPs were elected. The second Majlis was inaugurated with 61 deputies. The line-up of the 2nd assembly was as follows: 22 clerics, 18 landowners, government employees and tradesmen, four princes as well as writers, journalists, and doctors. Twenty of representatives of the first term of Majlis found their way into the 2nd Assembly. Five clerics were elected to monitor the compliance of bills with Islamic teachings. The outstanding feature of this term of Majlis was the increased presence of scholars, government employees, and landowners.

Unlike in the first Majlis, in the second Majlis political parties were recognized. Under this Assembly, four parties were formed. First was the Social Democratic Party formed with inspiration and close ties to Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Hassan Taqizadeh, Soleyman Eskandari, Mohammad Ali Torbat, and Mohammad Reza Mosavat were top members of this party. Democrats had 28 seats and openly criticized the government. "Iran" newspaper was the official newspaper of this party. They believed in the separation of politics

from religion and distribution of property, obligatory education, and opposition to the House of Commons. That is why they were described by their opponents as revolutionary and radical and were faced with religious accusations.

Moderates were opposed to Democrats. Clerics like Abdollah Behbahani and Mohammad Tabatabaei and warlords like Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan supported this party which had the backing of tradesmen and business owners. The moderates dominated Majlis with 53 seats. This party had two newspapers, *Majlis* and *Vaght*. Democrats criticized moderates, accusing them of being reactionary and capitalist.

Alongside these two major parties, two small parties were active in Majlis. One of them was “*Ettefaq and Taraqi*” (consensus and progress) which initially teamed up with moderates. The other one was progressive party or Liberals who were mainly busy with defending the rights of people living in southern Iran and they used to stay away from political disputes. (Ettehadieh, Ibid: 309-355)

Due to differences between political parties, Majlis had to spend much time on settling these disputes. Throughout the working of Majlis, 12 Cabinets were nominated for votes of confidence; Mohammad Vali Khan Tonekaboni (6 times), Mirza Hassan Khan Mostofi al-Mamalek (3 times) and Najaf Qoli Khan Bakhtiari (3 times). (Modarresi et al, 2014: 58)

The discrepancies ended in threats, excommunication, and even assassination. The murder of moderate scholar Abdollah Behbahani was blamed on the Democrats. Some scholars excommunicated some Democrats and forced Taqizadeh to leave the country and not return until the Pahlavi regime was established. Meantime, the Atabak Park clashes in the northwestern city of Tabriz, in which Sattar Khan was killed, and the dethroned shah’s attempt to take power added to chaos and differences.

Despite all these problems, 78 pieces of legislation were signed into law in the 2nd Assembly. Some of them were Salt Monopoly Law, Law on Carrying Arms, Law on Telecommunications and Post Prices, Public Treasury Law, Deed Registration Law, Medicine Law, Opium Restriction Law, and Martial Law. (Shajiei, 1965: 140-141)

Amid this imbroglio, the country was mired in economic woes and Majlis was concerned with finding sources of financing. Russia and Britain were refusing to pay Iran debts and they even prevented other countries from doing so. Majlis decided to hire a number of advisors specializing in foreign affairs, except for Russian and British affairs. Morgan Shuster, an American, was finally picked as a public treasurer. Shuster embarked on extensive and useful reforms in Iran to the dismay of Russia and Britain. The Russians occupied Rasht and Anzali in northern Iran in November 1911 and issued Iran a three-month ultimatum to expel Shuster, hire advisors after consultation with Russia and Britain, and compensate the occupying Russian troops. They warned that Tehran would be occupied in case their demands were not met. Majlis opposed the government’s decision to unseat Shuster, but vice regent Nasser al-Molk dissolved the assembly on December 24, 1911. Three years later, the 3rd National Assembly was established on December 6, 1914. (Abrahamian, 2004: 136-137)

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