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Chapter Five: Society and Labour: The Iranian Textile Workers, 1906-1941

Introduction

Whether in craft industries or large-scale industrial establishments, workers' worksite experiences, perceptions and actions are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the period under study. Twentieth century was a century of revolution which brought about far-reaching consequences in many aspects of life in diverse parts of the world. At the turn of the century a various constitutional revolutions took place in many countries. For instance, in Iran and the Ottoman Empire the constitutional revolutions which occurred in 1906 and 1908 respectively provided, if temporarily, a suitable environment for labour activism and for a freer expression of the labour-related demands and grievances. Both in the Ottoman and Iran workers seized the relatively free political atmosphere of the post-revolutionary period as an opportunity and launched various strikes.¹ Later on, the First World War which posed unprecedented military challenges to the belligerent countries and brought about major problems for non-belligerent countries played an important role in terms of labour relations. None of the states could predict that the war would last so long with so much heavy burdens and catastrophic consequences. To maximize the war effort governments had to mobilize not only troops to fight the war but also workers to work at factories. In many cases, in order to replace the male workforce growing numbers of women and children worked at factories usually under utterly difficult conditions. That "the demands made by the Government on the British people over the course of the First World War were on a scale hitherto unknown" can be said to hold true for any country which was influenced by the War in way or the other.² The wartime problems were aggravated by high inflation. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia added to the already existing labour activism in many countries including Iran. The war was followed by waves of strikes and demonstrations in various parts of the world especially in Europe and the United States. Demands were put forward for union recognition, shorter working hours, and wage raises exceeding the inflation rate. Consequently, the wartime hardships and the post-war challenges called for an effective state intervention to

¹ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, "The Emergence of the Ottoman Industrial Working Class, 1839-1923", in *Workers and the Working Classes in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, Quataert Donald & Zürcher Ecik Jan Zürcher (eds.) (London: Tauris, 1995), 22.

² Douglas Brodie, *A History British Labour Law, 1847-1949* (Oxford & Portland: Hart Publishing, 2003), 149.

restore order and improve working and living conditions. The Great Depression which broke out in 1929 and continued throughout 1930s further escalated the economy and workers' conditions. Iran was not an exception to these worldwide developments.

In early twentieth century, foreign economic and political domination and internal despotism have created class-crossing alliances in Iran which at times obscured, if only temporarily, class boundaries. Nonetheless, the subsequent developments and the dissemination of communist ideas contributed to radicalization among the working people especially in urban settings. Formal labour organizations and the Communist Party of Iran radicalized workers and organized several labour actions throughout the period under investigation. Yet in a country where craft industries and small manufactures were the principle types of production, the impact of the leftist agitation was, for the most part, confined to urban centres and to factories which employed only a small part of the workforce throughout the period under investigation, as well as for a long time afterwards. Although much emphasis has been put, in the existing literature, on formal labour organizations and the collective labour activities which have been organized by them, a number of significant issues remain unclear. For instance, it would be interesting to learn more about informal labour organizations and non-organized labour which comprised the majority of the Iranian workers. Also, generally speaking "working class" is erroneously and unclearly taken as a distinct category and insufficient attention is paid to the discursive formation of the Iranian working class.³

This chapter examines labour issues in Iran from the inception of the First Majles in 1906 to the end of Reza Shah's reign in 1941. It first discusses the discursive process of working-class formation in Iran in order to show how workers gradually developed a peculiar linguistic category for themselves as distinct from the language used by subaltern groups at large.

³ For two studies, the first on Iran and the second on Egypt, stressing the importance of the discursive making of the working class in the Middle East see: Touraj Atabaki, "From Amaleh (Labour) to Kargar (Worker): recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 84, Fall 2013, pp. 159–175; and Zachary Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899-1914," *Poetics Today* 15, not. 2 (1994): 157-190. Atabaki aptly summarizes this 'material' formation narrative of what he calls 'the teleological Marxists' (Atabaki, "From Amaleh", 21) as follows: 'the typical argument goes as follows: following the rise and expansion of the capitalist relations in Western Europe, embodied in colossal development of heavy industries and mass production commodities, the rising European powers were poised to expand the realm of their power – not only to add new market, but also to acquire raw materials desperately needed for their industries. The result of these processes set the standard for a new division of labour, worldwide. From the mid-nineteenth century Iran joined this global capitalist relationship, and by the end of the century, with the introduction of capitalist development in Iran and its integration into world markets, the labour force was created as a new working class. However, the consolidation of working class consciousness was only materialized by unionist and political movements, which the Iranian workers organized in early twentieth-century. By that time, the making of the Iranian working class had already been accomplished for all intents and purposes. Atabaki, "From Amaleh", 21.

Secondly, it then provides an overview of the workforce in Iran. Thirdly, the chapter investigates legislative attempts at regulating labour. Although no distinct labour law existed in Iran throughout this period there have been several, often sector-based attempts to improve working conditions. Fourthly, such major labour issues as working hours, wages and sanitary conditions are addressed. Fifthly, collective labour activism and formal labour organization will be discussed. The sixth and last section will investigate petitioning as a form of labour activism. Although this chapter predominantly analyses the textile workers, other industries and sectors will also be referred to throughout.

Being of the Working-Class: From *Kolah-namadi* (Felt-capped) to *Kargar* (Worker) ⁴

Many studies on Iranian labour history seem to take for granted the existence of the working-class as a category, or else they seek its formation exclusively in certain material practices. Indeed the role of these material practices or structures has been great in Iran particularly from the mid-19th century onwards. Foreign economic domination, domestic political and economic developments, and the subsequent dislocations of villagers and townspeople, significantly contributed to the formation of the Iranian working class. However, beyond these structural developments the formation of the Iranian class should first be sought at its discursive formation. Through this discursive formation one not only can see how Iranian workers came to see themselves as such, but also follow how their relationships with the political establishment and other classes were shaped and shifted depending on their self-perceptions. There is no evidence to suggest that at the turn of the 20th century the Iranian

⁴ In this study “worker” is employed in the widest sense of the word to encompass not only those workers who were employed at large-scale industrial establishments, i.e. the industrial proletariat, but also those who worked in craft industries. Although a theoretical discussion of labour falls outside the interest of this study it should be noted that in much of the scholarship on Middle Eastern labour history a tendency prevailed for a long time to restrict workers exclusively with factory workers. The often progressive role attributed to proletariat was the main dynamic behind the generous and exclusivist attention paid to factory workers. However, as Keyder emphasizes for the Turkish case such an orthodox approach ignores or downplays the various forms of employment. Caglar Keyder, “Afterword: the Current Condition of the Popular Classes”, in *Workers and the Working Classes in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, ed. Donald Quataert and Ecik Jan Zurcher (London: Tauris, 1995), 147. Those people working in “non-centralized sites”, in Quataert’s phraseology, not only constituted the most common type of employment in Iran during the period under study but also a study of Iranian textile labour would be deficient without at least attempting to refer to them. My understanding of ‘worker’ is based on Marcel van der Linden’s comprehensive and all-inclusive definition: “every carrier of labour power whose labour power is sold (or hired out) to another person under economic (or non-economic) compulsion belongs to the class of subaltern workers regardless of whether the carrier of labour power is him- or herself selling or hiring it out and, regardless of whether the carrier him- or herself owns means of production”. Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Towards a Global Labour History* (Brill: Leiden, 2008), 33. Apparently this definition covers both free and un-free labour. Somewhere else he defines free labour as “the hiring out by a person (the worker) the right to use his or her labour power for a limited time to another agency”. Jan Lucassen, “Writing Global Labour History c. 1800-1940: A Historiography of Concepts, Periods and Geographical Scope”, in *Global Labour History*, ed., Jan Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 45.

working-class existed, at the discursive level, as a distinct and exclusive social entity, for being a worker did not constitute a distinct identity even for those who by every criterion could be considered workers. Workers' discursive formation, therefore, gradually emerged from a general subaltern discourse and in time gained a language of its own.

In addressing higher authorities, Iranian subalterns described themselves—apart from such words as *ahali* and *mardom* (both meaning people) which separated only the ruled from the rulers—in various ways: *kaminegan* (inferior subjects)⁵; *bicharegan* (the helpless) and *badbakht* (the wretched)⁶; and *bandegan* (servants)⁷. Or else they combined a few of them such as *bichareh*, *'avamm*, and *kolah-namadi* (helpless, common folk and *'amaleh*—literally, “felt-capped”) There is thus a move from *ahali* (the people) to *kolah-namadi* (*'amaleh*).⁸ This latter term was particularly used to refer to a class of unskilled labourers who migrated to larger towns and cities, as a result of the increasing rural-urban migration which took place from the late 19th century onwards.⁹ A set of petitions sent by the tanners of Kashan in the early 1920's sheds light on how they perceived themselves against the ruling classes. In February 1922 the tanners wrote a petition to the Iranian Majles in which they complained of the excessive taxes and the subsequent deterioration of their trade:

To the deputies of the sacred Majles, may God empower its pillars. Our opinion as the *helpless* members of the guild of tanners and of the *'amaleh* and the common folk of Iran who are involved in trade and agriculture is that the honourable deputies and the ministers should not only deal with foreign affairs but they should also pay attention to domestic issues. The initiatives at the political level make sense to the clergy and the wise men who they enjoy dealing with such matters but as the common folk we lack that capacity.¹⁰

In their subsequent petitions they called themselves *ranjbar* (toiler), and *fa'aleh* (labourer). The term *kargar*, the equivalent of 'worker', came into common usage towards the end of the Qajar period in the 1890s when the first wave of modern manufacturing began in Iran.¹¹ Urban wage-earners – the casual, seasonal and unskilled construction labourers – were at that time commonly referred to as *'amalajat* (labourers) not *kargar* (worker). Following the

⁵ LMDVIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “pashm risi”, 25 November 1921.

⁶ LMDVIPt. d7/k90/j12.3/p101-150, 20 May 1929.

⁷ LMDVIP. d6/k70/j35/p1-61, Shahrud, 4 March 1927.

⁸ LMDVIP. d4-k49-j24.2/p62, “From Tanners of Kashan to the Honourable Majles”, 4 February 1922.

⁹ Willem Floor, *Guilds, Merchants and Ulema in the Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Washington: Mega Publishers 2009), 11.

¹⁰ LMDVIP. d4/k49/j24.2/p62, “From Tanners of Kashan to the Honourable Majles”, 4 February 1922.

¹¹ Asef Bayat, “Does Class ever Opt out of the Nation? Nationalist Modernization and Labour in Iran”, in *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World: Nationalism, Ethnicity and Labour in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Willem van Schendel and Eric J. Zürcher (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 199.

Constitutional Revolution in 1906, in the parliamentary proceedings *kargar* was used. For instance, according to the list which enumerated the responsibilities of the Majles, the twenty sixth article suggested that it was supposed to “make sure that workers (*kargar*) and labourers (*fa’aleh-ye ‘amaleh*) receive their wages in time and in full”.¹² However *kargar* did not emerge for some time as the standard and a distinct category from *fa’aleh* or *‘amaleh*.¹³ Apparently, as Atabaki argues, prior to the First World War there is no evidence that the working people in Iran called themselves *kargar*.¹⁴ From the early 1920’s onwards *kargar* increasingly came to be used to refer to the working people.

However one should be careful not to make far-reaching conclusions from this slow development in Iranian workers’ self-identification. ‘Workerness’ and some sort of ‘classness’ existed among Iranian workers even when *kargar* was not yet established as the standard term.¹⁵ The dislocations resulted from foreign economic domination, unpopular economic policies inside and the mass migration to Russia in search of jobs created some sort of a collective identity among Iranian workers. The transformation of this collective identity into a distinct working class identity gradually started from the early 20th century onwards. The relatively freer political atmosphere created by the Constitutional Revolution and wide politicization accelerated this transformation. To this the industrialization attempts in the post-WWI Iran, particularly during the 1930’s, were added. From the early 1920’s onwards *kargar* came to denote any wage-earners whether employed at large-scale establishments, at small-scale workshops or at public baths and at bakeries. From the early 1920’s onwards not only did the number of industrial workers steadily increase, but also the diversified nature of the Iranian working class became more pronounced. In addition to men, woman and children gained an increasingly visible place in working life.

¹² Mozakarat-e Majles, session 152, 13 September 1907.

¹³ Bayat, “Does Class ever Opt out of the Nation”, 199.

¹⁴ Atabaki, “From Amaleh”, 24

¹⁵ I took “classness” from Bayat who seems to disagree at this point and argues that only by late 1940’s “certain indications of a development of modern classness among Iranian workers became evident”. Bayat, “Does Class ever Opt out of the Nation”, 199. Although notably different from 1940’s there have developed among Iran workers a certain sense of solidarity already during late 1920s. The radical modernizing policies of 1930’s further accelerated this process. I borrowed “workerness” from Lockman, Lockman, “Imagining the Working Class”, 161.

The Workforce in Iran

Between 1900 and 1940 the population of Iran increased from 9.29 to 14.55.¹⁶ There is no conclusive evidence as to the size of the workforce in Iran for the period under study. According to Abdullayev between the late 19th century and the First World War there were 126,000 workers in Iran of whom 17,000 were employed in modern industrial establishments while the rest worked at craft industries and traditional economic activities.¹⁷ Abdullayev's figures were based on a narrow definition of worker. Table-5.1 shows the economically active male population and its proportion to the total population for three years at twenty-year intervals. According to the figures provided by Bharier in Table-5.2, however, in 1906 the estimated total number of economically active men over ten years of age was 3.812 million of which 3.431 million were engaged in agriculture. This means that the number of the industrial workers was at that time 381,000. In either case the real numbers should have been higher than this. As Floor argues underage children and quite a significant number of women who were engaged in all kinds of economic activities especially in carpet weaving should also be counted as part of the workforce.¹⁸ Moreover, peasants too usually spun or wove for additional income and they gradually incorporated into the urban workforce.

Table 5.1: The Percentage and the Number of the Economically Active Male Population

<i>Year</i>	<i>Men over ten in total population (%)</i>	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Potentially active males</i>	<i>Estimated active men</i>
1906	39.0	10.29m.	4.013m.	3.812m.
1926	39.0	11.86m.	4.625m.	4.394m.
1946	35.6	15.93m.	5.671m.	5.104m.

Source: Bharier, *Economic Development*, 34.

As shown in Table-5.2 according to Bharier between 1906 and 1946 the proportion of the agricultural workers to the total labour force declined about 15 percent despite the rise in the actual number of agricultural workers caused by the increased population.¹⁹ This should have resulted from increasing rural-urban migration as well as growing employment opportunities in cities and towns.

¹⁶ Bharier, *Economic Development*, 26.

¹⁷ Jalil Mahmudi and Naser Sa'idi, *Shuq-e Yak Khiz-e Boland*, 44 (Tehran: Qatreh, 2002), 44.

¹⁸ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 115-16.

¹⁹ Bharier, *Economic Development*, 34.

Table 5.2: The Proportion of the Agricultural Workforce to the Total Population.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Proportion (%)</i>	<i>Agricultural Workers</i>
1906	90	3.431m.
1926	85	3.735m.
1946	75	3.828m.

Source: Bharier, *Economic Development*, 34.

Yet, as Table-5.3 shows the proportion of the workers at large industrial establishments in the total population was insignificant, although it experienced a steady rise from the mid-1920's onwards. If we consider the three tables together we have to conclude that there were 1,276,000 industrial workers in Iran in 1946 of whom 94,000 were employed in large-scale industrial establishments with ten or more workers. The rest were then employed by smaller manufacturers. If we add to this the child and female workers and those who were employed in the service sector, the figures should be higher.

Table 5.3: The Proportion of the Industrial Workers to the Total Population

<i>Year</i>	<i>Proportion (%)</i>	<i>Industrial workers Employed at large Industrial Establishments Including the Oil Industry</i>
1906	-	-
1926	1	0.030m.
1946	2	0.094m..

Source: Bharier, *Economic Development*, 35.

Abdullayev suggests that the industrial workforce was derived mainly from three sources. The first source was the peasantry.²⁰ From the late 19th century the Iranian peasantry, especially those who lived in the northern regions sought employment in the expanding industries in Tsarist Russia. For example, of a total 192,767 workers who crossed the Russian border legally in 1911 as many as 160,211 were Iranians.²¹ Many of these migrant workers came from rural backgrounds. Following the October Revolution of 1917, thousands of these Iranian migrant workers in the Caucasus returned to their homeland to join the mounting army of unemployed labourers.²² Also, following the establishment of the oil industry in the south from 1908 onwards peasants were employed in this growing industry as in the other industries

²⁰ Z. Z. Abdullayev, "Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie rabocheho klassa Irana v kontse XIX-nachale XX vv." in Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran: 1800-1914*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971, 48.

²¹ Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subalterns on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire", in *The State and the subaltern: Society and Politics in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: Tauris, 2007), 40.

²² Touraj Atabaki, "Missing Labour in the Metanarratives of Practicing Modernity in Iran: Labour Agency in Refashioning the Discourse of Social Development", in *Interventions: The Impact of Labour Movements on Social and Cultural Development*, David Mayer and Jürgen Mittag eds. (Wien: International Conference of Labour and social History – ITH, Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 171-195. Here 180.

elsewhere in the country. Particularly by the end of the First World War the deteriorating living conditions forced many Iranians, especially the peasantry, to abandon their homes in search of a living. The second source of the nascent Iranian proletariat, according to Abdullayev, was the artisans.²³ Reports abound as to the decline in craft industries as a result of which many craftsmen sought employment in the growing industries. This was particularly true for the textile industry. It is impossible to draw a definitive picture of the workforce employed in craft industries in Iran. However craft industries continued to employ the greater part of the workforce. The first census undertaken in 1956 sheds important light on this point. It appears that as late as the mid-20th century in many parts of the country craft industries ranked as the second most important economic activity after agriculture. As far as people ten years of age and over and involved in gainful economic activity are concerned, the percentages for some of the major craft centres were as follows: in Tabriz district out of the 181 thousand thirty-eight percent of the men were farmers whereas 33 percent were craftsmen. Of the women sixty-one percent were engaged in crafts while 25 percent were in service sector²⁴; in Isfahan and its environs, of the 195 thousand persons 47 percent of the men were farmers and 26 percent were craftsmen whereas sixty percent of the women were engaged in crafts while 23 percent were employed in services²⁵; of the 165 thousand persons in Mashhad district 48 percent of men were farmers whereas 23 percent worked in craft and related industries. The percentage for the women was forty-five percent for crafts and 36 percent for the service sector²⁶; in Tehran of the 581 thousand persons those who were engaged in crafts amounted to thirty-four percent among men and 12 percent among women. For the men, sales and related occupations ranked second with 15 percent while as much as sixty-two percent of the women were engaged in the service sector.²⁷

Kashan was no different. Out of 73 thousand, 57 percent of the men were farmers and 27 percent were craftsmen while of the women, ninety-six percent were engaged in crafts while a mere 2 percent were employed in services²⁸; in Yazd, of the 106 thousand persons sixty-one

²³ Abdullayev, "Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie", in Issawi, *Economic History*, 49.

²⁴ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. III Tabriz Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, September 1958, ix.

²⁵ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. IV Isfahan Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, October 1958, ix.

²⁶ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. V Mashhad Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, February 1959, ix.

²⁷ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. II Tehran Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, July 1958, ix.

²⁸ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. XXII Kashan Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, May 1960, ix.

percent of the men were farmers and 23 percent were craftsmen. Of the women, as much as eighty percent were engaged in crafts while farming came second with 12 percent²⁹; in Shiraz census district among 110 thousand persons those employed in crafts amounted to 21 percent for men and as much as seventy-five percent for women. Also while farming was the largest economic sphere for men with forty-six per 28 percent of the women were reported to be employed in service occupations.³⁰ It was also reported on various occasions that those engaged in craft industries tended to be younger than those in other occupations.³¹ When we also consider the fact that boys and girls under 10 years of age were also employed in craft industries, it appears that the actual figures should be even higher. At any rate, although a substantial number of former craftsmen sought employment at the growing large-scale industrial establishments, craft industries continued to be the most important manufacturing activity throughout the period under investigation. The mass of urban poor constituted, according to Abdullayev, the third source of the Iranian working class.³² Recurring famines, droughts, and arbitrary rule in the provinces had pushed many peasants throughout the 19th century to larger towns and cities.

The Nature of Textile Labour

Although craft industries remained the principal type of textile manufacturing in towns and cities, peasants also spun and wove for own-use or for additional income. Although guilds have historically functioned as the principle centres of craft-based production in urban settings for the period under study they have steadily lost much of their controlling capacity. However as far as the late 19th and early 20th centuries are concerned, apart from references to the negative impact of ready-made imports on them, little is known even about the Iranian guilds and their workings, let alone about their workforce. Floor rightly argues that compared to Egyptian and Ottoman guilds, Iranian guilds remain largely understudied.³³ Guild membership was a male privilege and female membership was possible only in exceptional cases. In rural places, on the other hand, it was common to have a spindle or a loom, or

²⁹ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. XVI Yazd Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, April 1960, ix.

³⁰ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. VII Shiraz Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, January 1960, ix.

³¹ Census District Statistics of the First National Census of Iran, November 1956, Vol. V Mashhad Census District, Tehran: Ministry of Interior Public Statistics, February 1959, ix.

³² Abdullayev, "Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie", in Issawi, *Economic History*, 50.

³³ Willem Floor, *Guilds, Merchants and Ulama in Nineteenth Century Iran*, Washington: Mage Publishers, 2009. P. 120.

alternatively both, at which women along with men worked as a part-time activity. For instance, a German traveller makes the following remarks in early twentieth century:

However little the Persian, in general, likes to work, insofar as the common people are concerned it is rare to see the women just gossiping without their working at the same time on the spindle or the loom – not unlike our own womenfolk with their knitting. But even the men if they do not sleep during the day or sit in a tea-house, also start their spinning-wheel during the idle moments, but often to be occupied rather than of an urge to be productive.³⁴

Problematic though they are in their essentialist judgemental remarks about Iranian people, which abound in the travelogues of Westerners visiting Iran or other Middle Eastern countries, such observations are still useful for seeing how widespread weaving activities were. The rapid commodification of agriculture during the nineteenth century furthered the integration of the part-time weavers into the growing textile industry, particularly carpet making, through the putting-out system. With the disintegration of the guild system due to several factors, such as the ready-made imports, centralization policies and the establishment of a nation-wide market which rendered the closed-up guild structure dysfunctional, the labour force involved in urban-based manufacturing changed too. In small manufactures where sometimes tens of workers worked under overly unfavourable working conditions, women and children were employed extensively. Guilds seem to have substantially lost their regulating capacity, especially over the workforce, from the late nineteenth century onwards, which paved the way in urban centres for the dissemination of extra-guild manufacturing. Typical guild-based manufactures and the newly emerging workshops from late nineteenth century onwards are often indiscriminately referred to as ‘traditional industrial establishments’.³⁵ However, these workshops apparently displayed the guilds’ weakened control capacity at the production and workforce levels.

In the post-World War I period the number of female industrial workers steadily rose, especially but not exclusively in the textile industry. For example, due to the atrocities of the First World War, the Charities Directorate of Tehran Municipality established the *Dar al-Sanaye* ‘ or the House of Industries with the aim of providing such jobs as weaving and spinning to needy women. At the Wool Spinning Factory in Mazandaran which was erected in 1918 at least as many as three hundred women were employed.³⁶ On the other hand, in the

³⁴ Willem Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry in Historical Perspective 1500-1925*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1999. 16.

³⁵ See for example Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 117.

³⁶ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2. “Pashm risi”.

expanding textile industries during the 1930's, child labour was increasingly employed too. A survey of twelve cotton spinning and weaving plants in 1936 showed that although the number of male workers in the industry was declining as in other countries, instead of being replaced by female workers, their places were being taken by child-labour as seen in Table-5.4.³⁷ A list of the workers of the E'temadiyeh Weaving and Spinning Factory in Bushehr in 1937 shows that the average age of the workers was 21.6 and fifty-five workers were under fourteen (Appendix 5).³⁸ Also from among 707 workers at Vatan Factory in Isfahan in 1934, 184 were reported to be women.³⁹ As is also shown in Table-5.4 from the mid-1930's onwards there was a substantial increase in the number of the female and child workers.

Table 5.4: Workers in the Cotton Industry, by Gender and Age

Mills	March 1935			March 1936			March 1937		
	male	female	child	male	female	child	male	female	child
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	443	58	212
2	-	-	-	-	-	-	127	-	79
3	270	60	120	350	150	180	355	142	190
4	200	50	150	500	100	200	600	200	300
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	695	342	262
6	70	-	50	120	-	80	280	20	150
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	378	42	140
8	-	-	-	-	-	-	300	-	500
9	-	-	-	160	-	180	170	15	315
10	-	-	-	70	-	50	130	-	120
11	440	52	-	544	15	-	625	122	-
12	180	20	100	180	20	100	210	20	110
Total	1160	182	400	1924	285	790	4313	961	2378

Source: Touraj Atabaki, Willem Floor and Nazanin Sadeghi, "Change and Development in Labour Relations In Iran 1650-2000". *Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations 1500-2000*, https://collab.iisg.nl/group/labourrelations/documents?p_p_id=20&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&tabs1=recent-documents (last access. 27.11.2014).

Forced labour was another type of recruitment at the newly established factories. Forced labour was especially employed from the late 1920's onwards to supply the necessary workforce for the growing textile industry in northern Iran, where several large-scale industrial establishments were established during the 1930's. For example, in 10 April 1939 a "confidential and urgent" letter was sent from the Isfahan Municipality to the Governorship of Isfahan in which the need was expressed for workers to be employed at the newly established

³⁷ Bharier, *Economic Development*, 178.

³⁸ NLAI. 290/7115. 1316 (1937). The list excludes one worker whose birth and employment date are given as the same year.

³⁹ NLAI. 291/38, "List of the Workers Who Underwent Medical Inspection at Vatan Factory and their Dependents", 1313 (1935).

factories in Behshahr in the Mazandaran province in northern Iran.⁴⁰ It was also added that workers would be sent with their families, to prevent any attempt to escape in order to return to their families. Apparently the order was sent to various towns and in 12 April 1939 a similar one was sent to Shehreza in the province of Isfahan.⁴¹ In response, it was stated in 22 April 1939 that there was only one male worker suitable for the job and that many peasant women were engaged in such activities.⁴² We do not know how many workers were sent from Isfahan or elsewhere to Mazandaran. There are other reports regarding the employment of forced labour. For instance only two weeks before Allied forces entered Iran in 1941 a lengthy commentary on a report by Albert C. C. Embrechts, a Belgian employee of the American International Telephone and Telegraph Company in Tehran, was prepared by Harold G. Minor, the secretary of the American legation. Among other things he pointed out, in the following words, the plight of forced labourers in Reza Shah's reign: "forced labour, amounting almost to slavery, exists on some of the Shah's properties with wages as low as three and a half rials a day, from which the local police take a cut. Exploitation of the people, truly, has become scandalous and malodorous".⁴³

Regulating Labour: Attempts at Labour Legislation

It is not always easy to determine what is meant by labour legislation. The problem for the Iranian case stems from two main causes. On the one hand, during the period under study no distinct labour law existed in Iran. Instead, sector-based regulations were introduced often on a local scale. On the other hand, one's definition of labour very much delineates the scope of labour regulation. In the early twentieth century, "worker" was almost invariably taken to mean those who worked at factories, which Iran did not yet have many at that time. In what follows labour regulation is used to refer to every regulation which was introduced at the central and local levels and which targeted workers involved in every kind of trade and industrial activity. From the early 20th century onwards several political parties such as the Democrats and later Socialists and Communists addressed some preliminary labour issues

⁴⁰ NLAI. 291/1261, "From the Isfahan Municipality to the Governorship of Isfahan", 22 Farvardin 1318 (12 April 1939).

⁴¹ NLAI. 291/1261, "From the Governorship of Isfahan to the District Administer of Shahreza", 20 Farvardin 1318 (10 April 1939).

⁴² NLAI. 291/1261, "From the District Administer of Shahreza to the Governorship of Isfahan", 1 Ordibehesht 1318 (22 April 1939).

⁴³ Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Great Britain Reza Shah: The Plunder of Iran, 1921–1941* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 375. Embrechts' report dated July 12, 1941 and was titled 'Embrechts Report on Economic and Commercial Conditions in Iran' (891.00/1755).

such as working hours and child labour. For instance the Democrat Party's program declared that children under the age of fourteen must not be employed; the workday must not exceed ten hours; workers must get a weekly rest day; the factories must have necessary facilities for work and should provide the required sanitary conditions.⁴⁴ In 1919 The Socialist Party also included an eight-hour workday and the prohibition of the employment of children before they completed mandatory education among the party's objectives.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding their progressiveness such regulations took a long time to materialize.

In the beginning, provincial administrations played a prominent role in monitoring labour-related issues. Provincial administration was consolidated by the Constitutional Revolution. *Anjomans*, societies which were established in various cities in order to monitor elections to the First Majles in 1906, but continued to exist afterwards, were the main bodies which enjoyed much local influence. According to "the Law for the Provincial and District Council" which was passed by the Majles in 1906, the twenty-sixth article of the responsibilities of the Districts Council was to ensure the payment of workers' wages.⁴⁶ Other than this nothing specifically related to labour was mentioned. Apparently until the coup d'état in 1921 labour regulation consisted of local attempts such as the one in Kerman in 1913. The Deputy Governor of Kerman introduced a set of regulations to be maintained at carpet factories which incited carpet weavers to take sanctuary at the British consulate.⁴⁷ These disagreements brought carpet weaving to a standstill. Since much of the carpet weaving was done for European firms, they were also involved in the negotiations.⁴⁸ The regulations, according to the British Consul:

For the most part were in themselves desirable, an opinion in which the agents of the European carpet firms concurred. Some of them were however scarcely practicable, and to a large extent they could only be made effective after the lapse of a reasonable period of time, while in fact they were declared operative at once. On the other hand the conditions of the trade are notoriously scandalous and highly injurious to the health and wellbeing of the workers who are largely small children.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ittihadiyeh, *Maramnamaha*, 8.

⁴⁵ FO 248/1259.

⁴⁶ Mozakarat-e Majles, 13 September 1907. Provinces (*iyalat*) consisted of cities (*shahr*) which consisted of districts (*buluk*).

⁴⁷ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 85.

⁴⁸ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 85.

⁴⁹ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 85.

Subsequently the regulations were suspended but the question of the working conditions at the carpet industry would soon resurface. The most powerful pressure for labour regulation regarding this industry came from abroad when the newly founded the ILO (ILO), to which Iran was an early member, sent a memorandum to the Iranian authorities in 1921 in which it drew attention to the unfavourable working conditions in the carpet industry. The issue was discussed in the Fifth Session of the Governing Body of the ILO in October 1920 and consequently the case was presented to the Persian Government.⁵⁰ To this effect, on 31 October 1921 Albert Thomas, a former French politician and Minister and the first Director of the ILO, sent a letter to Prince Arfa' al-Dowleh, Iran's delegate to the Second Assembly of the League of Nations, in which he underlined the plight of the child and female workers in the carpet industry in Kerman.⁵¹ He first referred in the letter to the deliberations of the international conference held in Washington between 29 October and 29 November 1919 according to which the employment of children of under the age of 14 was forbidden. Following this he stated that children, some of whom were only five years old, had to work in the carpet industry in Kerman under unfavourable working conditions from sunrise to sunset with only a very short rest at midday. This, argued Thomas, hurt their physical and mental well-being. He then reminded the Iranian representative that since Iran was a party to the League of Nations and the ILO, their decisions were binding for it. Therefore he requested the Iranian authorities to take the necessary actions in this matter.

The same issue was reemphasized in another letter which was sent to the Iranian representative at the League of Nations.⁵² After reproducing the same account regarding the unfavourable working conditions of child and female labour in the carpet industry, it was stated the recent reports showed that the working conditions not only in Kerman but also in such cities as Kashan and Isfahan, were even more appalling than they previously been aware of.⁵³ It was discovered, continued the letter, that women had been paralyzed due to difficult working conditions and long working hours which amounted to about fourteen hours a day. In the subsequent negotiations and by the initiative of the British Consul in Kerman the owners

⁵⁰ Kosroe Chaqueri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran* (Florence: Mazdak, 1978), 202.

⁵¹ LMDCIP, d4-k55-j26.2 p158, 31 October 1921. The folder contains a Persian translation of Albert Thomas's letter to Prince Arfa' al-Dowleh. Thomas also mentions of the photos displaying the plight or underaged weavers in Kerman but unfortunately I have been unable to locate the photos in ILO archives during my research there.

⁵² LMDCIP, d4-k55-j26.2 p158. The translation of this letter was undated and it is not clear who the sender was but he apparently was Albert Thomas himself.

⁵³ It is also stated in the letter that a set of photographs attesting to the plight of women and children had also arrived to ILO but unfortunately during my research at ILO archive in Geneva I could not locate any of these photos.

of carpet factories which mostly belonged to Americans and Europeans agreed on a number of regulations regarding working conditions. Accordingly boys under 8 years of age and girls under ten must not be employed; carpet looms must be eleven inches from the ground to enable workers to comfortably lay down their legs; the workday must not exceed eight hours with a short rest at midday during which workers must go out of the workshops; a commission, whose members were not to consist of factory owners, must be formed to monitor compliance with the regulations.⁵⁴

The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mo‘azzaz al-Dowleh, also informed the British Legation, which backed ILO in this matter and whose several companies were involved in carpet industry in Kerman, that necessary instructions were sent to the local authorities in Kerman regarding the improvement of the working conditions.⁵⁵ Subsequently, the Governor of Kerman, Ja‘far Qoli Bakhtiyari, informed the Prime Minister, Ziya al-Din Tabataba’i, that a meeting was held with employers of the carpet industry on 11 December 1921 during which they agreed to the following: employment of journeymen should be strictly free and the contract should be based on mutual agreement; once approved by a religious judge (*hakem-e shar‘i*) the contract should be presented by the master to the *Kargozari* and the Directorate of Public Utilities for registration; the previous contracts should also be rearranged in accordance with the first two terms and should likewise be presented to these two authorities; the workday for journeymen as well as other employees should be eight hours in all seasons, and overtime shall depend on their consent for additional pay; boys under eight years of age and girls under ten should not be employed; masters should arrange the workshops with proper sanitary conditions; wages of journeymen should be increased five percent; on Fridays and public holidays should be free days; and men and women should work in separate workshops.⁵⁶ Shortly after the arrival of this report from Kerman the Majles sent a letter to the Prime Minister in which attention was drawn to the absence in the agreement reached by factory owners of a commission, as proposed by the British legation, which would monitor compliance.⁵⁷ Ultimately, on 17 December 1923 the Governors of Kerman and Baluchistan were ordered to issue the following regulations:⁵⁸

⁵⁴ LMD CIP. d4-k55-j26.2 p158.

⁵⁵ Chaqueri, *The Condition*, 208.

⁵⁶ LMD CIP. d4-k55-j26.2 p158, 8 January 1922.

⁵⁷ LMD CIP. d4-k55-j26.2 p158, 9 January 1922.

⁵⁸ Chaqueri, *The Condition*, 106.

- 1- The working day for all workers in carpet factories shall be 8 hours. The manufacturers (employers) shall not be entitled to require their workers to work longer than the specified hours.
- 2- On Fridays and on public holidays work shall be suspended in all carpet factories, and the workers shall be entitled to receive their wages for these days as working days.
- 3- Boys under 8 years of age and girls under ten years of age shall not be employed in these factories.
- 4- The boys' workshop shall be separate from the girls' workshop. Mixed workshops shall be absolutely prohibited.
- 5- Foremen (persons who dictate the patterns to the workers) shall not be admitted into the girls' workshop. Forewomen shall be employed to dictate the girls' patterns.
- 6- A manufacturer shall not in any case engage or retain a worker suffering from an infectious disease.
- 7- Carpet weaving workshops shall not be situated underground or in dump rooms. Workshops shall have windows towards the south, so that the sun can enter them.
- 8- The carpet weaving loom shall be one meter above the floor of the workshop and the seat shall be high enough for children to be able to perform their work as comfortably as possible.

In addition to these, several articles were also added regarding the enforcement and inspection for the implementation of these measures, and fines were proposed for non-compliance. The result was satisfactory for both ILO and the British Government. The British Minister in charge of the ILO affairs admitted his satisfaction in the House of Lords.⁵⁹ The Kerman negotiations were even regarded as “a very interesting example of the influence that may be exercised by international inquiry and persuasion”.⁶⁰ Yet, a few years later an article titled “the Kerman carpets, or the cutting off of the offspring of Kerman” appeared in *Shafaq-e Sorkh* (The Red Dawn) in 1928 which was quoted at length in the ILO's official publication.⁶¹ After emphasizing the importance of the carpet industry for Kerman, the unfavourable working and living conditions of the workers were once again underlined. It was stated that “it is not possible to meet in the city of Kerman itself one carpet weaver, boy or girl, woman or man, who has the appearance of a human being, the majority of the men and youth are

⁵⁹ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 90.

⁶⁰ ILO, *Industrial and Labour Information*, Vol. 1 January-March 1922

⁶¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, Vol. XXVI (April-June 1928), 92-93.

sallow, abject, hunchbacked with deformed legs and arms, unfit for work”.⁶² Apparently the regulations of 1923 had not been properly implemented. As stated in the article, during the governorship of Abd al-Hosain Teymurtash, the former Governor of Kerman and the Minister of Court in 1928, a commission was appointed which consisted of chiefs of the District and City Police, the Director of Education and certain of the master carpet weavers. Subsequently a Government decree was issued which contained a set of sanitary and physical instructions for carpet workshops in line with the 1923 decree but in a more detailed fashion.⁶³ Apparently these instructions also remained limited in scope and effect, and the unfavourable conditions in the Kerman carpet industry made it one of the centres of labour activity.

Lack of a proper labour law was a matter of concern for workers too, as in the example of public bath attendants who, in the petition they sent to the Majles in August 1926 complained about the absence of a labour law:

To the Honourable Deputies of the Sacred Majles May God Empower its Pillars. With utmost respect,

In this period of Constitutional rule everyone, and every guild and trade is provided with laws and regulations with the exception of the public bath attendants. For bakers it was decided that they should work eight hours a day in two shifts. Yet, public bath attendants start work one hour and a half before the sunrise and work until three hours after the sunset and we work in immense heat. When we want to have some rest the master of the bath assigns us with drudgeries so that in an eighteen or nineteen-hour workday we have no time for rest but they do not pay us accordingly. We request that the municipal directorate in charge of these matters should inspect public bath workers and pay them in accordance with their work. Also [...] they give us two free days without pay although others have one day off with or without pay. What if we humble workers remain sick for four days? What should we eat then and how should we provide for our families? In addition to these, we suffer hardships during the summertime, and in wintertime a Mazandarani comes and presents a gift to the master and takes over our jobs.⁶⁴

In the rest of the petition bath attendants requested the adoption of measures to regulate their working conditions and safeguard their rights. Nonetheless, despite these calls, labour regulation remained a peripheral issue throughout the period under study. Most of the legislation attempts during the 1920's and 1930's concerned state employees. Due to the fever for industrialization during this period, labour issues remained of secondary importance. Iran had to be modernized, and workers' concerns were not on the list of immediate priorities. This

⁶² Industrial and Labour Information, Vol. XXVI (April-June 1928), 92.

⁶³ For the details of the decree see Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 92-93.

⁶⁴ LMDICIP. d6/k8/j7, 12 August 1926.

point is made overtly in correspondence between Mirza Seyed Baqer Khan Kazemi, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, an employee of the ILO.⁶⁵ In a letter dated October 1933 and sent to Kazemi, Jamalzadeh raised a number of labour-related issues.⁶⁶ He mainly urged the establishment of a state department which would deal exclusively with agricultural and industrial affairs by focusing on labour issues. Furthermore, he stressed that since industrialization was increasingly underway in Iran at the time the creation of a labour office to ensure the neat working of this process was a necessity and that many Eastern countries have adopted essential measures on this issue. For instance, added Jamalzadeh, such countries as Egypt and Turkey have either established a labour office or a similar body to deal with industrial and agricultural affairs and to take part in the preparation of the necessary laws and regulations. He then proposed the establishment of an office with the following tasks: the inspection of working conditions and the situations of workers who were employed in the agricultural sector, craft industries or large-scale industrial establishments; the preparation of bills for laws and regulations about such labour issues as wages, working hours, sanitary conditions, worker-manager relations, setting the minimum limit age for workers, and the treatment of pregnant workers and the training of workers.⁶⁷ In May 1934 Baqer Khan Kazemi replied by stating that the introduction of laws and regulations about labour was not an urgency in Iran since the erection of factories was a new and an ongoing phenomenon in the country.⁶⁸ Once again, labour was equated with factory labour.

The Factory Act:

In the mid-1930's unfavourable working conditions, mainly in small-scale textile factories in Isfahan, came to the fore. In the ensuing investigations it was discovered that the conditions in textile factories were extremely unfavourable, they were full of garbage, and workers had to work under dust and in putrid air. The worksites were constructed in such a way that they had

⁶⁵ RL 48/1/1. "Creation of a Labour Office-Persia". ILO.

⁶⁶ RL 48/1/1. 18. October 1933. "To the Iranian Foreign Ministry". ILO.

⁶⁷ RL 48/1/1. "Creation of a Labour Office-Persia". ILO.

⁶⁸ RL 48/1/1. "To Mr. Jamalzadeh, Member of ILO". 21 May 1934. ILO. Baqer Khan Kazemi was not alone in this observation. Based on the agrarian nature of the Iranian society and the slow development of the large-scale industrialization some contemporaries as well as historians argued that until late 1920s no workers existed in Iran. This is most clearly reflected in the following and often quoted remarks of Agha Seyyed Ya'qub, deputy of the Majles, in 1922: The full remark is as follows: "As to the issue of employer and employed to which the Honourable Soleyman Mirza pointed out I say that we do not yet have workers (*kargar*) in Iran and everybody is an employer (*karfarma*). If, with God's will, one day our trade and agriculture improve and factories are established then we will have to deal with the issue of employer and employed. For now we do not have workers, employers, railways." Mozakarat-e Majles, 10 January 1922.

neither air nor light.⁶⁹ The Factory Act which was adopted by the Majles in 1936 and introduced a number of essential sanitary measures for working conditions.⁷⁰ These regulations were in themselves revolutionary but not only did the Act remain largely on paper as far as workers' rights were concerned but also, it only concerned factories with ten or more workers. Besides, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) as the biggest employer in the country, after the Iranian state, did not implement the Act. The company found impossible the implementation of the Act and the modification of their existing practices accordingly. Ultimately, "the Act no doubt became a dead letter in many parts of the country – but nowhere more than in the oil districts of Khuzestan".⁷¹ It can even be argued that in some respects the Act made things worse for workers.⁷² The following measures, to name a few, were introduced that were to the disadvantage of workers: any misconduct from the part of employees on "sanitary, technical and disciplinary instructions of the competent authorities" was subject to imprisonment or fines; neglect of duty was to be compensated by the employee by a deduction from his/her wages and the sum was to be decided by the factory owner as the employee could also be prosecuted if negligence was held to be an offence. In case of non-compliance the employee was not only to make good the damage caused to the factory but would also be liable for five to seven days of imprisonment or to a fine of a certain amount.⁷³

These points can best be illustrated by a comparison of this Act with the Labour Law in Turkey which was passed by the Turkish Parliament in 1936 and put into force in 1937.⁷⁴ To start with, both the Iranian Factory Act and the Turkish Labour Law concerned establishments with ten or more workers. This point was criticized by some leftist publications in Turkey. For instance, according to the newspaper *İşçi Dünyası* (Worker's World) the definition of 'worker' in the Law was quite narrow and should be expanded since, argued the newspaper,

⁶⁹ NLAI. 291/3284, 29 Tir 1315 (20 July 1936).

⁷⁰ For a full translation of the Act see L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1944, 213-224. For a discussion on the act see: Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 95-96.

⁷¹ Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil: A Study in Power Politics* (London: 1958), 97. Quoted in Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 95.

⁷² Willem Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 95.

⁷³ Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, 219.

⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis of the the Turkish Labour Law of 1936 see: Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri, 1920-1946* (Ankara: İmge, 1999), 353-410. The following information about the Law is based on this source unless stated otherwise. For a Discussion on the Law see: Ahmet Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), 104-107; and Diren Çakmak, "Toplumsal Uzlaşma Belgesi: 1936 Tarihli İş Kanunu" (Social Consensus Document: Labour Law Dated 1936), *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2007/1, 127-169..

“all of us, except the children and the elderly are workers”.⁷⁵ Although industrial development had recorded comparatively more impressive success in Turkey in mid-1930’s both countries were dominated by small-scale manufactures but in practice the laws concerned only large-scale industrial establishments. However, both of the laws contained details regulations regarding work contracts, working hours, female and child labour as well as sanitary conditions of the worksites. The underlying aim of these two laws was to discourage collective labour activities as well as to thwart communist and socialist agitation. The states acted in both of the laws as the sole and only legitimate intermediary between the employers and the employee. Karpat argues that “since the Labour Law numbered 3008 was prepared in line with the pre-WWII Italian law it regulated workers’ issues in a totalitarian manner.”⁷⁶ Makal describes this feature of the Turkish Labour Law by stating that the law was “protective” in individual labour issues and authoritarian in “collective” labour issues.⁷⁷ This latter feature was clearly reflected in the Iranian Factory Act which forbade the employees “to form or take part in any union or association prejudicial to the interests of the factory.”⁷⁸ Both in Turkey and Iran workers’ right to form organizations or to become members of the existing organizations came later on. For instance the Iranian Labour Law of 1946 recognized workers’ right to form a union.⁷⁹

In short, the liabilities of the employer, according to the Act, were less than those of the employee. These points were made strikingly by the workers of the Pashmbaf Factory in Isfahan.⁸⁰ After complaining about the arbitrary practices of the factory management in the past years “workers’ representatives”, more than a hundred individuals, as far as the signatures show, express their pleasure with the Factory Act which arguably was a result of their insistent efforts. Yet, they criticize the authority granted to the employer, or the factory manager, for the implementation of the adopted measures by arguing that workers were dismissed on unsound pretexts. Therefore the petitioning workers requested rehiring of the fired workers as well as the mediation of the judicial authorities in case of conflict between the workers and the factory.

⁷⁵ “Başlarken”, *İşçi Dünyası*, I (1 February 1953). Quoted in Yiğit Akın. “The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics in Early Republican Turkey: Language, Identity, and Experience”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 54, Issue S17. 174.

⁷⁶ Kemal Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi: Sosyal, Ekonomik, Kültürel Temeller* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayıncılık, 1996), 106. Quoted in Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, 382.

⁷⁷ Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, 387.

⁷⁸ Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, 219.

⁷⁹ Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, Syracuse (N.Y : Syracuse University Press, 1985), 62.

⁸⁰ NLAI. 291/565 “To the Governorship of Isfahan, 1321 (1942).

Working Hours and Wages

For a long time no fixed rules seemed to exist in Iran about working hours. Usually Iranian workers had to work long hours, and a workday between ten and twelve hours was apparently normal.⁸¹ It could sometimes be as long as sixteen hours.⁸² Occasionally working hours were defined by sunrise and sunset as in the example of the aforementioned public bath attendants who complained in their petition that they had to start work “one hour and a half before the sunrise and work in the heat until three hours after the sunset.”⁸³ In some cases working hours were explicitly arranged at least on paper. For example it was decided in 1921 that the carpet weavers in Kerman would work eight hours in all seasons and Fridays and public holidays would be free days.⁸⁴ The long working day was one of the main concerns of early labour activism in Iran. For example in 1918 the printers in Tehran struck and obtained an eight-hour workday.⁸⁵ Also in 1919 the Socialist Party included an eight-hour workday among its objectives.⁸⁶ Through the 1930’s several measures were taken to restrict working hours especially at the newly founded factories. Nonetheless arbitrary decisions continued to exist. For example the workers of the Pashmbaf Factory in Isfahan complained in May 1943 that the factory management extended their work hours from 8 to 10 hours.⁸⁷

Our information about the wages for the entire period under study is rather inconclusive. Wages varied considerably from one sector to the next while regional differences were also significant. At any rate as a rule wages were below the poverty line especially for unskilled workers. According to Abdullayev before the First World War in a silk reeling factory in Rasht male workers’ wages for a day varied between 1,5 and 3 qrans while female workers earned between 0,5 to 0,75 qrans.⁸⁸ Child workers could earn 7 shahis a day.⁸⁹ Among weavers wages were more egalitarian but still quite low. An adult male weaver could earn 1,5 qrans a day while women and children received for a day’s labour about 1 qran and 0,5 qran respectively.⁹⁰ In the early 1920’s a weaver in Tehran could earn at most 3-4 karans a day.⁹¹ In

⁸¹ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 97.

⁸² Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 97.

⁸³ LMDCIP. d6/k8/j7, 12 August 1926.

⁸⁴ Chaqueri, *The Condition*, 106.

⁸⁵ Ardashir Avanesiyan, *Safahati Chand az Jonbash-e Kargari ve Komunisti-ye Iran dar Dowran Avval-e Saltanat-e Reza Shah: 1922-1933*, Leipzig: Tudeh Publication, 1979, 7.

⁸⁶ FO 248/1259.

⁸⁷ NLAI. 291/567, “The Complaint of the Workers of the Pashmbaf Factory about Unpaid Wages and Increase in Work Hours”. 26 Ordibehesht 1322 (7 May 1943).

⁸⁸ Issawi, *Economic History*, 41.

⁸⁹ Issawi, *Economic History*, 41.

⁹⁰ Issawi, *Economic History*, 41.

⁹¹ Shokrollah Mani, *Tarikhcheh-e Nahzat-e Kargari dar Iran*, (Tehran: Taban, 1979), 7.

the mid-1930's at large mills average wages were about sixpence (two rials) for a ten hour day compared to 63 pence in Britain, 23 pence in India and 14 pence in Japan.⁹² In 1928 a British commercial attaché remarked that a labourer's wage amounted to three to four grans per day. For these wages he could only buy "bread and cheese and an occasional piece of cotton cloth for his women-folk". Artisans received an additional five to ten grans.⁹³

Sanitary Conditions

In a radio broadcast dated 19 October 1942 A. K. S. Lambton, the press attaché of the British legation at the time of the broadcast and a famous British historian of Iran, emphasized the appalling working conditions of workers, including children, which she personally observed.⁹⁴ Generally speaking epidemic diseases have constituted a major problem in Iran.⁹⁵ There were not enough medical staff or infrastructure to fight the diseases. Reportedly in 1924 there were only 905 physicians in the country.⁹⁶ For example, in February 1933, petitioners from Zarand, in the province of Kerman, complained about the inattentiveness of the deputies to their repeated requests for a doctor to take care of sixty thousand people.⁹⁷ Although the ratio of doctors to the population almost tripled from the mid-1920's to the mid-1930's it still was a mere 1:4.000 in 1935 compared with more distressing 1:11.000 in 1924.⁹⁸ Apparently, the sanitary conditions at industrial establishments became a matter of concern in the mid-1930's. Workers often had to work in dark and poorly ventilated and insufficiently lighted rooms which exposed them to dust, steam and dirt. This was especially true for smaller workshops. For example it was discovered in the ensuing investigations at small workshops in Isfahan that workers had to operate in extremely dirty and dark environments where there was no proper ventilation.⁹⁹ The Bazaar of Hajj Mohammad Hosayn which was managed by a German national named Jackman and produced blankets for Vatan Factory was the centre of

⁹² Bharier, *Economic Development*, 178.

⁹³ F. R. Lingeman, "Report on the Finance and Commerce of Persia 1925-1927". London: HMSO, 1928. 30. Quoted in Floor, *Industry and Labour*, 100.

⁹⁴ ILO. CL-49.01.48. 11. 1942. "Conditions of Labour, Hours of Work-Iran- Industrial Conditions in Iran".

⁹⁵ About public health in Iran in general see Willem Floor, *Public Health in Qajar Iran* (Washington DC: Mage, 2006); A. R. Neligan, "Public Health in Persia: 1914-1924", *The Lancet*, Volume 207, Issue 5352, Pages 690 - 694, 27 March 1926.

⁹⁶ Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, Standford: Standford University Press, 1961, 73. Quoted in Rager M. Savory, "Social Development in Iran during the Pahlavi Era", in *Iran under the Pahlavis*, George Lenczowski ed., California: Hoover Institution, 1978, 92.

⁹⁷ LMDCIP. d8/k4/j19/p188-kerman, "Request for Remaining in the Office of Dr. Navabi", 4 February 1933.

⁹⁸ Savory, "Social Development in Iran", 93.

⁹⁹ NLAI. 291/3284, 29 Tir 1315 (20 July 1936).

such workshops.¹⁰⁰ Consequently a proposal was put forward by the Isfahan Municipality to design special places where such workshops would operate under sanitary conditions.¹⁰¹

Investigations were soon extended to large-scale establishments such as Rahimzadeh and Vatan factories in Isfahan. It was reported that Vatan Factory had only one drinking vessel for four hundred workers and that workers used a water melon for this purpose during the summer.¹⁰² Appendix-6 contains the detailed results of the medical inspections undertaken in 1934 and 1936 by Dr. Mahdi Filsuf, a prominent doctor in Isfahan, on workers employed at Vatan Factory as well as on their families. Out of 557 workers of Vatan Factory, only 17 were found to be in bad health.¹⁰³ Yet, an array of medical problems from malaria (41 workers), to syphilis (75 workers), rheumatism (42 workers), various injuries (72 workers), etc. were discovered.¹⁰⁴ Since the inspections included workers' families it is not easy to make far reaching conclusions from them about conditions of sanitation. Taken as a whole, this list does not provide much information about the respiratory manifestations of worker-related illnesses in Iranian textile mills. Yet lung diseases such as asthma, influenza, lung congestion and tuberculosis were observed. Also it was discovered in 1936 that sanitary conditions at Rahimzadeh factory which employed 340 workers in 1940 were far from satisfactory.¹⁰⁵ There is no mention in the inspections about the working conditions in small-scale manufactures.

The degree of the reliability of the inspections is not clear. Yet apparently it exercised an impact on the introduction of the above mentioned Factory Act which introduced a number of regulations on hygiene and sanitation, ventilation, lighting, heating and cooling of the work site, etc. Detailed rules were determined about the warmth of the work site, prevention of mosquitos and dust from entering the factory, provision of special clothes to workers as far as was possible, and the establishment of dispensaries in the factories. The following were among the issues regulated in the Act: buildings should be at least three meters high, unless required otherwise for technical reasons; the doors and the windows were to be adequate for ventilation and arranged so as to make workers comfortable during work; the work premises were to be cleaned while workers were not in; artificial light, if needed, was to be arranged in accordance with the work done and should not disturb workers' eyes; the worksites were to be

¹⁰⁰ NLAI. 191/3284, "To the Governorship of Isfahan", 16 Tir 1315 (7 July 1936).

¹⁰¹ NLAI. 191/3284, "From Isfahan Municipality to the Governorship of Isfahan", 20 Tir 1315 (11 July 1936).

¹⁰² Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 98.

¹⁰³ NLAI. 291/3284, "Report of the Medical Inspection on Workers", May 1936. See Appendix 6.

¹⁰⁴ NLAI. 291/3284, 29 Tir 1315 (20 July 1936).

¹⁰⁵ NLAI. 291/3284, "To the Governorship of Isfahan", 11 Tir 1316 (2 July 1937).

heated in winter time in to specified temperatures; fresh and cool water was to be provided with workers with an exclusive cup for each worker; measures were to be taken to prevent excessive noise; pregnant women were to be released on full pay during confinement; workmen were to be provided with special clothes for work; adequate medical facilities were to be provided inside factories.¹⁰⁶

The more distressing fact was that factories employed only an insignificant portion of the Iranian workforce, the majority of which worked in cottage and craft industries. Immediately after the Factory Act inspections were made again in Isfahan of the sanitary conditions of workers. As shown in Appendix 6 several reports were prepared again for the Vatan Factory.¹⁰⁷ The subsequent reports speak of the appalling working conditions at such factories as Barq and Rahimzadeh in Isfahan, as they also clearly show the difficulty of controlling the smaller workshops scattered throughout the city.¹⁰⁸

Socialism and Labour Activism in Iran

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 took place as the result of a complex and class-crossing alliance of various groups which regarded the absolute monarchy as the main hindrance to economic, as well as political and social, progress. However, lower classes and radicalized groups soon discovered that such privileged classes as the tribal chiefs, the large landowners and the senior religious leaders came to be the real beneficiaries of the revolution.¹⁰⁹ The immediate aftermath of the Revolution witnessed the shattering of this alliance. The class-based nature of the First Majles from 1906 to 1908 furthered this process. With the gradual disintegration of the absolute monarchy, a new and more heterogeneous type of political community emerged in Iran, into which workers slowly integrated. Due to the dismay created by the post-Revolutionary developments, many Iranian migrants in Russia, who had been indoctrinated by the Russian Social Democrats, believed that a Communist revolution was the means to solve Iran's problems.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, many Iranians inside Iran regarded the establishment of a powerful government as the only viable solution. Such a government would eliminate foreign hegemony in the country and unfold development

¹⁰⁶ Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, 214-217.

¹⁰⁷ NLAI. 291/3284, "Report of the Medical Inspection on Workers", May 1936.

¹⁰⁸ NLAI. 291/3284, "From the Governorship of Isfahan", 16 Shahrivar 1315 (7 September 1936); and NLAI. 291/3284, "To the Governorship of Isfahan", 11 Tir 1316 (2 July 1937).

¹⁰⁹ Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy*, 6.

projects especially in the economic realm. To them the ideal government would ensure economic development, security and order in every corner of the country without using any coercive power to penetrate into people's everyday lives especially when penetration was not to their advantage. The process was more complex for workers. Until the development of large-scale industrial establishments many workers were employed in craft industries. For the period from the failure of the constitutional experiment in 1911 to the establishment of the authoritarian Pahlavi regime in the mid-1920's, workers often complained of the absence of state authority to safeguard their interests. However from about 1925 until 1941 they increasingly conceived of and perceived state power as hostile to their interests. Thus from a labour perspective the period between 1906 and 1941 was characterized by workers' drifting perceptions about and attitudes towards the state authority.

The dichotomy of organized and non-organized labour has for a long time haunted the scholarship on Middle Eastern labour. So has the distinction between the workers employed in craft industries and those who worked in factories. A putative clear-cut distinction was implied between these two allegedly discrete categories. While those workers who worked at factories were depicted as having class-consciousness and acting accordingly, the rest of the workers, if they were even regarded as such, were characterized as bereft of class-consciousness. If we consider the fact that until the end of the 1930's, and for some time afterwards, the textile industry, like many other industries in Iran, was largely dominated by craft or cottage types of production, the workforce involved in them deserves closer scrutiny. It is true that their actions are less adequately documented than those of the factory workers. Besides, unlike the factory setting, in the relationship between the journeymen or the apprentices and their master exploitation was less visible and the acquisition of an independent shop for a journeyman depended on the goodwill and the support of his master, who typically worked side by side with him. These conditions, however, should not prevent us from scrutinizing their experiences nor should they be misleadingly assumed to be passive. What is equally wrong, however, is to suggest tacitly if not explicitly, that those who were engaged in craft industries mattered only when involved in "recognizably modern forms of labour struggle".¹¹¹ For the period under study, at least until the early 1930's, several confrontational labour actions took place throughout Iran, but apparently, the majority of

¹¹¹ Sherry Vatter, "Militant Textile Weavers in Damascus: Waged Artisans and the Ottoman Labour Movement, 1850-1914", in Donald Quataert and Eric J. Zürcher ed. *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839-1950*, 35-58, here 36.

workers often opted for more non-confrontational means to obtain better working and living conditions. At the same time, however, a non-obvious working class discourse and ideology was simultaneously growing in Iran especially from the mid-1910's onwards. For this development, structural changes and workers' reactions to these changes were as much responsible as the increasing radicalization among the Iranian working class through the formation of leftist organizations and publications.

From the early twentieth century onwards, Iran had come under the influence of socialist ideas. The immigrant Iranian workers in the Tsarist Russia played a crucial role in this process. Mass migration to the Caucasus to for jobs was commonplace among Iranians, particularly among those who lived in the northern regions near Russia.¹¹² Starting in the early 19th century, this trend increased later in the century due to the famines and economic instability in Iran, which contrasted with the flourishing economy in Russia, especially in the oilfields in and around Baku.¹¹³ Within ten years between 1897 and 1907 the number of Iranians living in Central Asia rose from 23,191 to 55,000.¹¹⁴ Moreover, between 1876 and 1890 an average of 13,000 Iranians acquired work permits and visas each year from Russian consulates in such northern cities as Tabriz, Mashhad, Rasht and Astarabad, to enter Russia legally. In Tabriz alone, the figure increased 110 percent from 15,615 in 1891 to 32,866 in 1900.¹¹⁵ In Khorasan the number of those seeking "work in the Transcaspian region in 1909 increased so fast that the number of villages with offices granting external passports rose from ten to twenty".¹¹⁶ Overall, in 1911 Iranians constituted as many as 160,211 of a total of 192,767 workers entering Russia legally.¹¹⁷ These figures should be considered together with those who crossed the borders by illegal means. Many of the migrant workers came back to Iran, and they did so often with some political experience. They were influenced by Marxist ideas and started to develop a socialist political language.

In the midst of the constitutional discussions in 1905, the Tabriz Social-Democratic Group was formed by Armeno-Iranians in Tabriz.¹¹⁸ The main question preoccupying the Group concerned collaboration with non-socialist groups, primarily for the Constitutional

¹¹² For an analysis of this migration trend see in Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subalterns on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire", in *The State and the subaltern: Society and Politics in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: Tauris, 2007), 31-52.

¹¹³ Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests", 37-38.

¹¹⁴ Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests", 38.

¹¹⁵ Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests", 40.

¹¹⁶ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, p 52. quoted in Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests", 40.

¹¹⁷ Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests", 40.

¹¹⁸ Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 13.

Revolution.¹¹⁹ According to Tchilinkirian, a member of the Group, two tendencies prevailed. The first tendency, the ‘Democratic’, favoured such collaboration and disfavoured a purely Social-Democratic education at that time.¹²⁰ However, although the second tendency agreed on the necessity of participation in the revolutionary movement it opted for an active educational program along socialist lines, among workers and other possible recruits.¹²¹ In the meantime a number of political organizations were formed among the Iranians in the Transcaspian regions. The Iranians living in the Caucasus had, in 1905, one year prior to the Russian Revolution, formed the Hemmat organization which in turned established the *Ferqah-e Ejtema’iyun-e ‘Ammyun* (The Social Democratic Party) known as *mojaheds* for which Nariman Narimanov was responsible.¹²² The following were declared among the party’s aims:¹²³

- 1- Limiting the power of the monarch.
- 2- Granting workers the right to vote, irrespective of their income or wealth.
- 3- Holding parliamentary elections based on universal suffrage.
- 4- Redistributing the large landed estates among peasants and introducing legal protections for peasant ownership of land.
- 5- Granting democratic rights for workers, such as freedom of association, speech and assembly, and the right to strike.

Social Democrats participated in the Second Majles between 1909 and 1911 as a separate group. Led by Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh the central committee of the party consisted of Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, Solayman Mirza Eskandari, Mirza Baqer Agha Qafqazi, Mirza Abd al-Hosayn Khan Vahid al-Molk, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Mosavat, Mirza Ahmad Qazvini and Mirza Mahmud Khan.¹²⁴ According to the Democrats, the twentieth century had the same significance for the East as the seventeenth century had for the West in the sense that the “outmoded feudal system” was to be replaced by the overwhelming power of capitalism.¹²⁵ Iran would also join this inevitable course of history. The party also expressed its determination to preserve the constitutional system and the rule of the parliament. Also, according to the program every national was equal before the state

¹¹⁹ Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 14

¹²⁰ Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 14.

¹²¹ Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 14.

¹²² Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 17.

¹²³ Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 18.

¹²⁴ Ferioudun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi-ye Ejtema’i dar Nahzat-e Mashrutiyat-e Iran* (West Germany: Noupad, 1985), 136.

¹²⁵ Mansureh Etehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha va Nezamnama-ha-ye Ahzab-e Siyasi-yi Iran dar Dovvomin Dowreh-e Majles-e Shura-yi Melli*, (Tehran: Nashr-e Tarikh-e Iran, 1982), 4.

irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. Freedom of the press, organization and movement were also stressed in the program.¹²⁶ About economic issues the program was rather detailed. Besides a number of economic and political issues, the program also touched upon the following labour issues: no child under the age of fourteen could be employed; the working day should not exceed ten hours; workers should have a weekly day off; factories should have the necessary facilities for work as well as to fulfil the sanitary conditions.¹²⁷

The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 directly influenced the communist movement in Iran. Soon after the Revolution the Communist Party of Iran was founded in 1920 as an offshoot of the Justice Party. In the first congress of the Adalat Party on Iranian soil, in Anzali, in June 1920 the Communist Party was founded. Through the effort of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Iran, the Central Council of Federated Trade Unions (CCFTU) was established in 1921 and in the following three years reached a large size. Trade unions were active in the oil industry, as well as amongst carpet weavers in Kerman and textile workers of Isfahan, along with other industries. Communist and socialist publications remained a common feature of Iran's intellectual scene during the 1920's and several labour actions of varying extent took place in this period. With the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924 and Moscow's decision to 'Bolshevize' the international communist movement, which was re-affirmed at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, communist groups received orders for more radical actions in their respective countries.¹²⁸ The strikes at the Abadan oil refinery in 1929, and the Vatan Factory Strike in Isfahan in 1931, were among the notable labour actions of the period.¹²⁹ As a result of these and similar developments, the state's attitude towards communist and socialist activities stiffened. First of all, a series of articles, which were quite possibly probably based on the revelations of Grigory Sergeyevich Arutyunov, also known as Georges Agabekov, were published in the Parisian periodical *Le Matin* between 26 and 30 October 1930, causing much speculation about the communist activities in Iran as in other Near Eastern countries.¹³⁰ Agabekov had for a long time functioned as a spy for the OGPU (predecessor of the KGB) in Central Asia, the Caucasus,

¹²⁶ Ittihadiyah, *Maramnamaha*, 6.

¹²⁷ Ittihadiyah, *Maramnamaha*, 8.

¹²⁸ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Pattern of the Communist Revolution* (London: Methuen and Co., 1960), pp 104–10.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of the Abadan strike see: Kaveh Bayat, "With or Without Workers in Reza Shah's Iran: Abadan May 1929", in *The State and the subaltern: Society and Politics in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London, 2007), 111-122; and Stephanie Cronin, "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class: The 1929 Abadan Oil Refinery Strike", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46: 5, 699 – 732.

¹³⁰ Boris Volodarsky, "Unknown Agabekov", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 28, No. 6, (2013): 890–909. Here 891-2 footnote 4.

and the Middle East.¹³¹ The information he disclosed regarding the communists in Iran resulted in the persecution and execution of many Iranian communists. Also, earlier in 1931 the Iranian communists started to organize in Europe and a conference of Persian Communist Students was held in Cologne in February 1931.¹³² The delegates resolved “to uphold the standard of liberty and revolution [and] ... to do everything in our power to overthrow the regime of robbers ... [as] Persia must belong to the labouring masses”.¹³³ Ultimately in June 1931 the Majles adopted the anti-communist bill which, inter alia, banned the formation of trade unions.¹³⁴

However, until 1931 several strikes took place in various parts of Iran. In the Supplementary Fundamental Laws of 1907, freedom of expression (article 20), and freedom of association (article 21) were established.¹³⁵ The printers of the Kuchaki printing shop in Tehran became the pioneers of trade unionism in Iran when they formed a trade union in 1907.¹³⁶ Likewise the first strike took place in November 1906 when the fishermen of Anzali protested against Liazonov, the Russian fisheries concessionaire.¹³⁷ The strike took place in a form of sanctuary, at the telegraph office of Anzali, from where they complained to the Majles of the low price paid by Liazonov for each fish. It was largely due to the relatively free atmosphere ensured by the Constitutional Revolution that workers could strike. In 1907 telegraph operators of Tabriz went on a strike for the payment of their arrears.¹³⁸ In the same year the printers of Tehran went on a strike out of solidarity with their colleague who had been beaten up by the chief of the government printing office, E‘temad al-Saltaneh.¹³⁹ The strike ended upon the dismissal of the chief. Also the telegraph operators of Tehran went on strike for higher wages and better treatment. Likewise the workers of the power plant of Amin al-Zarb in Tehran organized a strike in 1907.¹⁴⁰ The strike lasted for three days during which no electricity was supplied to the city. The striking workers demanded paid free days, clothes

¹³¹ Touraj Atabaki, “Napadid shodegan: chera hezb-e tudeh-e Iran duchar-e faramushi-ye gozinashi dar khosus-e hazf-e enqelabiyun-e komunist dar Iran ba dast-e “baradar-e bozorg” shodand?”, *Andisheh Pouya 11*, (Mehr&Aban 1392/Sept.&Oct. 2013): 69.

¹³² Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 93.

¹³³ K. Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 93.

¹³⁴ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 78.

¹³⁵ E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution, 1905-1909* (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966), 375. Between pages 362 and 384 Browne provides an English translation of the full text of the 1906 Constitution and the Supplementary Laws of 1907.

¹³⁶ Or 1906, see Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 31.

¹³⁷ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 32.

¹³⁸ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 33.

¹³⁹ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 33.

paid by the employer (since because of their work, their clothes would become torn), as well as the establishment of a health and safety fund.¹⁴¹ The strikes continued to take place in Iran throughout the 1910's and 1920's. Many of the early labour actions which took place from the inception of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 to the dawn of Pahlavi modernization in the early 1920's did not occur in the manufacturing sector. Instead, telegraphers, tramway workers and print shop employees were among the protagonists of labour activism.¹⁴² The First World War brought about a general destitution in Iran and the measures adopted by the government proved to be insufficient.

Considering the total workforce engaged in the textile industry, the number of workers involved in trade unions and strikes was quantitatively insignificant. Textile manufacturing continued for a long time to be guild-based in urban settings, while in rural areas, households were the sites of textile production. The textile industry largely remained, throughout the period under study, in the hands of smallholders. This especially held true until the 1930's when governmental support of and participation in industrial planning saw a remarkable rise. Nevertheless, even then the share of the privately-owned enterprises, mainly on a small scale, for the textile industry, was incomparably higher. This, more than anything else, contributed to the relatively smaller number of labour activities which took place among the workers employed in such enterprises—not simply because they were bereft of class-consciousness. It is true that formal labour organizations were, in early twentieth-century Iran, a latter-day phenomena, and that the development of organized labour went hand-in-hand with working class radicalization. Yet, we need to be cautious about what conclusions to draw from this. For instance, safeguarding the interests of the employees was apparently not the predefined *raison d'être* of guilds; it is controversial, particularly for the period under investigation, to argue that “guilds are and were organizations of masters which protected the interests of the employers, not of the employees” or to claim that the family-business nature of craft industries “precluded the possibility of labour disputes”.¹⁴³ Certainly, one of the functions of the guilds was to ensure the smooth functioning of the manufacturing process and to prevent or resolve disputes between the master and the employee. Therefore, we can expect that such a dispute would be settled within guild ranks before it turned into an open confrontation. Also, a journeyman, for instance, had a good reason to remain on good terms with his master

¹⁴¹ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 33.

¹⁴² For an analysis of labour activism during this period see: Willem Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran*, Washington: Mega Publishers, 2009, 31-39; and Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy*, 1-8.

¹⁴³ Willem Floor, “The Guilds in Iran: An Overview from the Earliest Beginnings Till 1972,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 125 (1975), 116.

not least because he need his master's support for acquiring an independent shop and becoming a master himself. In addition, the struggle against foreign imports or later on against increasing factorization seems to have brought the master and his employees closer as real or perceived victims of these processes. Besides, guilds increasingly became debilitated and lost much of their controlling and enforcing capacity which promised low, if any, possibility of obtaining compromises through an open protest.

During the 1910's and 1920's the voice of the textile workers is occasionally heard in the debates regarding the prohibition of the importation of foreign commodities and the promotion of domestic industries. Shokrollah Mani provides valuable information about the establishment of the Textile Workers' Union in Tehran. After describing the unfavourable working and living conditions of the workers in the textile industry, as in others, in Tehran he describes how Ahmed Lame' from the Printers' Union, encouraged him to establish a union for the protection of textile workers' rights.¹⁴⁴ Seeing Mani's enthusiasm, Lame' arranged a meeting with Seyyed Mohammad Dehgan, a communist who in his previous career as a journalist translated *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* into Persian.¹⁴⁵ Dehgan helped Mani form a trade union for textile workers which was represented in CCFTU. Mani states that because of the low wages the Weavers' Union was more active in organizing strikes compared to other trade unions.¹⁴⁶ For example upon the intention of textile factory owners to reduce workers' wages the Union organized a successful strike in 1922 as a result of which no reductions were made.¹⁴⁷

The rapid industrialization of the late 1920's and 1930's paid little attention to the plight of workers whose working conditions were usually heart-breaking. Wages, mostly on a piecework basis, were low, and job security was absent whereas vilification, and bastinado and similar punishments were commonplace. Apart from the oil industry, which was the most developed and mechanized industry in the country, the textile industry employed the greater part of the nascent proletariat. Villagers who migrated to larger towns and cities, former craftsmen who had lost their jobs for various reasons but mainly due to cheap imports, and destitute city-dwellers constituted the main source of labour in the nascent industries. Although both female and child labour were employed in factories, it was in the small-scale

¹⁴⁴ Mani, *Tarikhcheh*, 8.

¹⁴⁵ Mani, *Tarikhcheh*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Mani, *Tarikhcheh* 12. The printers' union was the other active labour organization in Tehran.

¹⁴⁷ Haqiqat, 1 May 1922. Quoted in Hojjat Fallah Tootcar, "Social and Political Activities of Guilds and Artisans from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution to the Rise of Reza Shah, 1906-1925." PhD diss., (in Persian), Tarbiyat Modarres University, 2003, 374.

establishments, particularly in carpet weaving, where they were extensively employed often in bad working conditions and for rather low wages.¹⁴⁸ A survey undertaken of twelve cotton spinning and weaving plants in 1936 revealed that the number of male workers in the textile industry was declining, as in other countries. Yet unlike in other countries, male labour in Iran was being replaced by child labour instead of female workers.¹⁴⁹ A list which was prepared for the E'temadiyah Weaving and Spinning Factory in Bushehr contains information about the workers and provides some ideas on the composition of the industrial workforce (Appendix 5).¹⁵⁰ Of the 193 workers listed in the roster, 188 were women while the men numbered only five. The number of children under 14 years was 57 with an average of 9.8 years. From the information provided in the roster, it appears that employing more than one worker from the same family was commonplace. But the list is not conclusive since, according to a list of factories prepared by the Ministry of Arts and Crafts, the factory had at least around five hundred workers with 3,500 spindles and 120 looms.¹⁵¹ Piecework was a widespread practice in the textile industry. In 1900, the basic daily wage for unskilled labour was 1 qran [about 4.5 pence] and a skilled worker received 1.5 qrans daily.¹⁵² In the mid-1930's, an average wage in the cotton textile-industry was about six pence for a ten-hour day.¹⁵³ Wages usually fell far behind the costs of living. Thus throughout the 1920's major labour actions took place in various sectors including the textile industry. Yet, the most notable strike of the textile workers took place in Isfahan in 1931 among the workers of Vatan Factory.

The working and living conditions of the workers who worked at factories were in most cases unfavourable. For some time, a secret committee affiliated with the CPI had been preparing for a strike at Vatan Factory.¹⁵⁴ The decision to strike on the coming May Day in 1931

¹⁴⁸ Female and child labour remain an unexplored dimension of Iranian labour history, particularly in the textile industry. Apparently women were an integral part of industrial labour in Iran from quite early on. For example a total of 300 female workers were employed in a wool spinning factory in Mazandaran apparently established by Tehran municipality, for destitute women. LMDCIP. d4-k25-j12, 3 September 1921. Again in early 1920s the issues of employment of female and child labour in unfavourable conditions at carpet industry in Kerman was raised by the recently created ILO (ILO), of which Iran was an early member, and its first Director, Albert Thomas. LMDCIP. d4/k55/j26.2/p158, 15 October 1921.

¹⁴⁹ Bharier, *Economic Development*, 178.

¹⁵⁰ NLAI. 290/7115, 1316 (1938).

¹⁵¹ NLAI. 380/387, 16 Bahman 1318 (6 February 1940).

¹⁵² Bharier, *Economic Development*, 5. 1 qran was equivalent to about 4.5 pence in British currency in 1900.

¹⁵³ Bharier, *Economic Development*, 178. The average wages in some countries were as follows: 63 pence in Britain; 23 pence in India; and 14 pence in Japan. Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁴ For an account of the strike see: Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 75-78; Farhang Qasemi, *Sandikalism dar Iran* (Paris: Bonyad-e Musaddeq, 1985), 171-176; Mahmudi & Sa'idi, *Shuq-e Yak Khiz-e Boland*, 215-221; For the details of this strike see: Serhan Afacan, "Revisiting Labour Activism in Iran: Some Notes on the Vatan Factory Strike in 1931." *International Labour and Working Class History*. (Forthcoming).

coincided with an imprudent move on the part of factory management. A contract was drafted by the director Mirza Ja‘far Kazeruni, son of Mohammad Hosayn Kazeruni, the famous merchant and owner of Vatan Factory, which according to the petitioning workers “was entirely in their own interests and against those of the workers”.¹⁵⁵ On May Day, some 60-70 workers arrived in a garden near the city. On the wall a red banner was fixed on which was written “Proletarians of the World Unite”.¹⁵⁶ However, the actual strike took place on May 7 with wide participation from the workers. A few workers who wanted to continue work were attacked by striking workers and were induced to strike. The striking workers came with a list of 13 demands including but not limited to: freedom to organize a union; changing from piece-work to a monthly salary; an 8-hour workday, instead of 12 hours, for not less than 5 qrans; abolition of vilifications, punishment with the stick, etc.¹⁵⁷ Some of the strike leaders were arrested and one, a CPI member, was taken to Tehran but succeeded in escaping.¹⁵⁸

Upon negotiation, not only was the contract withdrawn but workers also obtained the following concessions: the workday was reduced from twelve to nine hours; the examination system at the factory gate was abolished and vilification and money fines were reduced; a tea drinking facility was established and vessels with ice water were put in all departments; lunch time was extended from half an hour to one hour.¹⁵⁹ Communist newspapers celebrated these achievements and opined that the strike set an instructive example for the future activities of CPI.¹⁶⁰ The strike has usually been mentioned in the literature as an exceptional and exemplary action. Nonetheless, an analysis of the discursive tools which the striking Vatan Factory workers used attest to a more common and established form of labour activism through which workers engaged and negotiated with the central as well as local authorities in order to gain their support. This was much criticized by the communist publications of the time who blamed workers for having insufficient consciousness of the political context.

The workers wrote a petition on 11 June 1931 which addressed Reza Shah and complained that the imprisoned workers were not released although the strike was over:

¹⁵⁵ NLAI. 310/344, 20 Khordad 1310 (11 June 1931).

¹⁵⁶ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Paykar, 1 October 1931. Quoted in Chaqueri, Kosroe, *Asnad-e Tarikhi: Jonbash-e Kargari, Susyalesti, Demokrasi va Komunisti-ye Iran*, 22. (Historical Documents: The Workers’ Social-Democratic and Communist Movement in Iran 1905-1975, vol. 22) (Florence: Mazdak, 1993), 272-273.

¹⁵⁸ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 78.

¹⁵⁹ Paykar, 1 October 1931. Quoted in Chaqueri, Kosroe, *Asnad-e Tarikhi 2*, 272-273.

¹⁶⁰ Paykar, 1 October 1931. Quoted in Chaqueri, Kosroe, *Asnad-e Tarikhi 2*, 272-273.

To the sacred threshold of the protector of Islam His Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi may our souls be sacrificed for his sake,

We are the praying servants of His Majesty and the workers of the Haft Dast [Vatan] Factory. The director has drafted a contract which was entirely in the interests of the employer and against those of the workers. Some of the workers who were forced to sign it, but refrained from doing so, were dismissed from their jobs and then other workers also stopped working. As a result, by the order of the director (Mirza Ja‘far Kazeruni, son of Hajj Mohammad Hosayn Kazeruni), the chief of police arrested and jailed six of them and denied access to them as if they were bloodthirsty criminals. For one and a half months they are now in prison. We made complaints to the high authorities and to the state attorney, but no one paid attention to our grievances. Since Mirza Ja‘far is the richest person in Isfahan he bribes whoever necessary (*tarashsuhat-e servat-e u beh kasani keh bayad serayat bekonad mikonad*). For his own benefit and for not paying wages to workers, he deprived fifty workers of their jobs and livelihood. A group of painstaking labourers who try to live on a few pennies with their families are tortured and jailed and all this can happen under the eternal rule of His Majesty the Shah, may our souls be sacrificed for His sake. What should we do? O, just King and the protector of Islam, O, protector of his subjects, O defender of the helpless and the weak! For the sake of Your Highness, for the Sake of the Leader of the Age [the twelfth imam of the Shiites] pay attention to the cry of these humble and helpless workers. We do not know why the chief of police always obeys Hajj Mohammad Hosayn Kazeruni’s son and does whatever he says. We are left helpless, please help us! We are expecting His Majesty’s answer and mercy.¹⁶¹

The Ministry of the Interior informed the Government on 5 September 1931 about the release of the imprisoned workers following the necessary investigation.¹⁶² The deferential attitude of Iranian workers towards the Shah, as visibly reflected in the petition, was regarded by some communist newspapers as a mistake and the result of a lack of clear apprehension of the situation in the country. For example *Nahzat*, published in Berlin, argued a few months after the strike that “the Vatan Factory strike showed that workers did not understand the link between the present government in Iran and the capitalists”.¹⁶³ Moreover, it was also argued that workers were mistaken by going to the state attorney in order to ask for the release of their fellow colleagues and by surmising that the attorney would defend their rights. After all, argued the newspaper, not only the state attorney but also the Shah, the Majles, the government and the judiciary were entirely on the side of the capitalists and were inimical to workers.¹⁶⁴ Many of the striking workers, however, were well aware of the balance of power

¹⁶¹ NLAI. 310/344, 20 Khordad 1310 (11 June 1931).

¹⁶² NLAI. 310/344, “From the Ministry of the Interior to the Cabinet”, 13 Sahrivar 1310 (5 September 1931).

¹⁶³ *Nahzat*, 12 March 1932. Quoted in Kosroe Chaqueri, *Asnad-e Tarikhi: Jonbash-e Kargari, Susyalesti, Demokrasi va Komunisti-ye Iran*, 6. (Historical Documents: The Workers’ Social-Democratic and Communist Movement in Iran 1903-1963, vol. 6) (Florence: Mazdak, 1966), 155-161.

¹⁶⁴ *Nahzat*, 12 March 1932. Quoted in Chaqueri, *Asnad-e Tarikhi*, 155-161.

and carefully made a clear distinction between Reza Shah, whom they called “the helper of the oppressed and the weak”, and the local authorities whom they regarded as corrupt. Strike leaders and workers, too, knew that Reza Shah was in favour of keeping order and apprehensive about any independent labour movement and in fact, societal movements of any sort. The striking oil workers had followed in 1929 with a similar strategy by distinguishing between the “Crowned Father” and the hostile Anglo-Persian Oil Company, but to no avail.¹⁶⁵ The communists thought therefore that the Vatan Factory workers had made a similar mistake. In almost every labour movement during the 1920’s and 1930’s this ‘everybody-but-the Shah’ attitude was prevalent. That “all the responsibility must fall upon persons and positions of lower standing (corrupt officials), while the relationship of trust and of filial obedience with the prince is to be preserved and confirmed” was a universal strategy adopted by subalterns in various corners of the world throughout history.¹⁶⁶ For workers, their immediate concerns and working the system “to their minimum disadvantage”, to use Hobsbawm’s phraseology, ranked first.¹⁶⁷ This did not mean that workers lacked any comprehension of the political context. It meant instead that workers were cautious about taking the risks of confronting the Shah. Thus, by assuring the Shah of their obedience and of the fact that their action did not tarnish his legitimacy, workers emphasized their certain and concrete grievances. Following the Vatan Factory strike the anti-communist law was passed by the Majles which forbade all trade union activities.

Workers as Petitioners: Discursive Practices

Iranian workers slowly developed, from the early 20th century onwards, a language of their own through their discursive engagements and negotiations with the state, just as other classes did. Their discourse was far from revolutionary and was usually rather deferential. This discourse was not unchanging either. From the inception of the constitutional system in 1906 until the coming to power of Reza Shah, workers stressed the effort they spent and the sacrifices they made for the Constitutional Revolution. Afterwards, they employed a predominantly nationalistic language often in line with Reza Shah’s policies. Although the anti-communist law of 1931 effectively prevented the organization of strikes and trade unions,

¹⁶⁵ Bayat, “With or Without Workers”, 119.

¹⁶⁶ Marcia Schmidt Blaine, “The Power of Petitions: Women and the New Hampshire Provincial Government, 1695-1700”, *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement 9 Petitions in Social History (2001), ed. Lex Heerma Van Voss, 57-78. Here 37.

¹⁶⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “Peasants and Politics,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1973): 13.

the state continued to promote petitioning by workers for various reasons. The first reason stemmed from the fact that petitioning consolidated the relationship between the ruling establishment and the workers, and the legitimacy of the former, for historically the addressee of petitions was regarded in Iran, as anywhere else in the world, as the legitimate source of authority. Secondly, the Pahlavi regime discouraged and forbade any collective actions from any social group including, but not limited to, workers since feminists, intellectuals, tribal elements or religious groups were also seen as a threat to state power. Nonetheless, petitioning allowed for the ruling classes, and for Reza Shah, to remain aware of the perceptions of the people, local politics, and local rulers, on a scale difficult to attain by other means. In fact “even the most autocratic of governments used petitions as a source of information about popular feeling”.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, by addressing their petitions directly to the central establishments, often after their local initiatives had proved a failure, petitioners in a sense consolidated the centralization process in Iran. Finally, Reza Shah regarded himself as the father of the nation and cautiously maintained his image as a just ruler while liability for injustices and improper policies rested with those around him. Thus, by stimulating people to write petitions Reza Shah effectively established and consolidated his image as the protector of the nation as well as the “reference point of justice and of fairness”.¹⁶⁹ The petitioning workers were well aware of these discursive tools. Through petitions one can possibly verify certain forms and modes of communication between society and the institutions and to “reconstruct the procedures of mediation, repression, acceptance, and agreement” adopted by the authorities in response to social demands.¹⁷⁰ Certainly in almost any petition there is a tension, and therefore protest, negotiation and so on, for people hardly wrote petitions when things went satisfactorily. In no other realm can one so efficiently follow the trail of this process, and of state-society interaction for that matter, in terms of labour relations in Iran. In this sense as Cecilia Nubola argues in her study on petitions in northern and central Italian states in the early modern age, “‘petitioning’ refers to different concepts of authority and sovereignty as well as to specific power relations between rulers and those ruled”.¹⁷¹ It was within the frame of these different concepts that Iranian workers expressed and negotiated their demands and grievances with the state.

¹⁶⁸ The definition is taken from: Lex Heerma Van Voss, “Introduction”, *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement 9 Petitions in Social History (2001): 1-10, here 4.

¹⁶⁹ Cecilia Nubola, "Supplications between Politics and Justice: The Northern and Central Italian States in the Early Modern Age," *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement 9 Petitions in *Social History* (2001): 35-56. Here 36.

¹⁷⁰ Nubola, "Supplications between Politics and Justice", 35.

¹⁷¹ Nubola, "Supplications between Politics and Justice", 35.

From the mid-1920's onwards industrialization gained speed in Iran and turned into an ambitious state policy by the early 1930's. During this period the number of petitions seems to visibly increase, as other forms of resistance were explicitly forbidden. In their petitions workers voiced a variety issues such as lost limbs, irregular and unpaid wages, excessive working hours, unfavourable working conditions, lost jobs, mistreatment by managers, and work site injuries. In what follows I will analyse these petitions in terms of the labour issues they pertained to and the discursive tools which were used by workers. Although I will focus on textile workers, those from other sectors will also be mentioned when, and as much as, necessary.

A Weeping Traveller: Mohammad Ali of Yazd and Lost Jobs

In the early twentieth century foreign imports were perceived by workers as the main reason for the loss of their jobs. Already by the late 19th century the negative effects of foreign imports on native textile manufacturing were pointed out. It was believed that ready-made imports not only devastated the native industries but also pushed the have-nots further into poverty. The contraction in craft business in the provinces led many former craftsmen to seek employment in larger cities such as Tehran, Tabriz and towns in Khorasan which apparently still provided employment opportunities.¹⁷² Besides, going abroad, especially to Russia, was still a viable option until the First World War. In addition to these options, the situation of the craft industries was not necessarily as dismal as it was often said to be, since while some traditional crafts were hard hit by imports, a number of new ones came into existence. For example, making of Russian shoes (*orusiduz*) increasingly provided employment from the late 19th century onwards.¹⁷³ Another success story was recorded by the cloak weaving (*'ababafi*) industry.¹⁷⁴ *'Aba* weaving was an especially rich source of employment in the countryside where mostly women spun and wove, but was not limited to rural areas. By 1910 there were 120 master *'aba* weavers in the city of Isfahan.¹⁷⁵ This meant alternative employment opportunities for those craftsmen who lost their jobs in the face of foreign imports. Furthermore, if foreign trade hurt the crafts which competed with imports, at the same time it

¹⁷² Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 6.

¹⁷³ Tahvilda, 98. Qouted in Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Tahvilda, 106. Qouted in Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 7.

stimulated export-oriented production such as leather, opium, henna, and silk. For example, regarding the leather industry Sobotsinskii writes:

Leather production which until now was in the hands of a large number of enterprises standing halfway between cottage and handicraft industry and employing 5-10 workers, is changing into manufactories. Thus already in 1909 in Mashhad, and Hamadan, there were 8 workshops, with up to 40-50 workers each. The small handicraft shops were unable to withstand the competition and the large enterprises, and rapidly declined... In Hamadan in 1912, there were 300 small leather shops, compared with 400 in 1909, and in Mashhad 50 compared with 200.¹⁷⁶

The most striking growth, however, was experienced in the carpet weaving industry. So, craftsmen could leave one certain trade for another in the same town or else could migrate in search of a living in another town or city. However, first World War I, and then the modernization policies which were adopted from mid-1920's and steadily accelerated until 1941, posed new challenges to craftsmen. In the meantime, there was a slowly-growing industrial proletariat. In their petitions both types of workers complained about losing their jobs. Those workers who were involved at craft industries lost their jobs due mainly to the factorization and mechanization of the textile industry or the impact of cheaper imports. This point was frequently criticized by craftsmen from all over the country.

Craftsmen apparently condemned foreign investment in Iran as well as the factorization of Iranian industries, a point which is vividly made in the following lines from a petition sent by the Union of Merchants of Hamadan dated January 1926. After highlighting the unfavourable economic conditions in the country the petition remarked:

All over Iran one can see the dispirited and cheerless craftsmen whose numbers are already few. If you can spare some time, you can even visit their crypts (*dakhmeh*) which are the twentieth-century Iranian factories. Their look will answer all your questions. The most important of such factories are carpet-weaving factories which are under foreign control. Go and see how small boys and girls work there for an entire day for a few pennies. If foreigners buy Iranians carpets it is because of the low wages. If we compare them with workers of the industrialized nations of the world they earn a lot more money in a six to eight-hour workday. So we work but cannot earn and whatever we earn we spend it on foreign textiles and other goods.¹⁷⁷

The complaints about foreign imports and their negative effects on home manufactures were universal phenomena in Iran. In September 1927 silk-stuff makers of Yazd complained of losing their livelihood due to the cheaper imports.¹⁷⁸ Following this they requested the adoption of measures for promoting native textiles. They also requested in the petition the

¹⁷⁶ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, 259, footnote 6.

¹⁷⁷ Raziye Yoozofi Neyā, *Asnad-i Tejari-ye Advar-e Avval ta Panjom-e Shura-ye Melli* (Tehran: Library, Museum and Documentation Centre of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 2009), 503.

¹⁷⁸ LMDCIP. d6/k59/j27/p69, "To the Presidency of the Parliament", 21 September 1927.

appointment of an instructor to teach them the use of aniline dyes. In the response from the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Utilities it was stated that the law regarding the use of national cloth for state officials served as an effective means to promote domestic industries.¹⁷⁹ It was also added that the manufacturer should try, to the extent possible, to increase the quality of their goods and lower their prices. As far as the issue of aniline dyes was concerned it was stated that the limited budget of the Ministry did not allow the appointment of an instructor, but factory owners and producers could themselves come to Tehran to receive training in their use. The modernization policies of the 1920's and 1930's increasingly deprived many craftsmen of their livelihoods. With the Uniform Dress Law of 1928, for instance, traditional dresses were abandoned in state offices in favour of Western-style clothes which were supplied by the newly founded factories. This meant for hand weavers such as cloak makers the loss of their jobs. Thus in 1929 the cloak makers of Isfahan complained in a petition about the deterioration in their craft due to this law. In response Mehdi Qoli Hedayat, the prime minister, suggested that they weave fabrics suitable for "normal clothing" (*lebas-e ma'mul*) and added that the use of cloaks in winter was not forbidden.¹⁸⁰ According to the local *Akhgar* newspaper published in Isfahan, in February 1929 weavers of Tehran protested against the Vatan Factory and that weavers of Yazd lost their livelihood due to the mechanization of the textile industry.¹⁸¹

Hardly anyone criticized the modernization policies of the 1920's as harshly as Mohammad Ali of Yazd, himself a silk weaver who in an exceptionally long and utterly critical petition dated January 1929 condemned the deputies in very strong and elaborate language for not paying attention to the plight of the perishing craftsmen. The petition is worth quoting at length:

To the Honourable Head of the National Assembly,

When the Creator of humankind, the Instructor and the Trainer (*mo'alleim va morabbi*) of human beings, the Leader of the revolutionaries and the Rebutter of the claims of naturalists May peace be upon Him fought against His enemies who were also the enemies of humankind, He was defeated by them. When He was victimized and fell to the ground from His horse and when His enemies attacked His tent for plunder, he addressed their honour and said: "if you do not have religion do be free in your world" (*in lam yakun lakum dinu kunu ahraran fi dunyakum*). In order to weep popular preachers (*rowzehkhan*) translated this as "kill me and do whatever you want". However

¹⁷⁹ LMDCIP. d6/k59/j27/p69, "From the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Utilities to the Presidency of the Parliament", 26 June 1927.

¹⁸⁰ NLAI. 290/8508, "To the Guild of Cloak Makers of Isfahan", 1 Tir 1308 (22 June 1929).

¹⁸¹ 7 February 1929. Quoted in Rajai, *Esfahan*, 125.

those who have a deeper understanding (*ahl-e ma'ani*) know what it actually means so they do not restrict its meaning to that ignoble crown and to that particular day, for the real meaning addresses humankind in general and Muslims in particular, and is valid until the end time. The word means “o the worshippers of their world and desires (*donya va shahvat parastan*) if you do not have religion then work for hard for your world”. (A characteristic which Iranians lack). I am not trying to pretend to be a preacher here. My objective is to remind and be a witness to Iranians in general and particularly to the deputies who are in this time a source of emulation for the people, and I tell you that it would very good if you were sincere about your declarations and listen to this advice. [...]. You present yourselves as the proponents of toilers (*tarafdaran-e ranjbar*) and I wish you could sometimes turn this from simple words to reality. Have you ever wondered about the situation of this miserable folk of Yazd? [...]. Have you ever thought about the consequences of the Uniform Dress Law for the silk-stuff makers of Yazd? Their goods are no longer purchased by people. I remember well that their goods were exported to Russia twenty years ago and were used there. Today due to lack of consideration their products are neither sold nor used. Your lack of consideration and attention to this community is responsible for this. Why is this? This is because Iranians and the entire world turned into imitators and as you know it is the ones at the top who are imitated. When you use European socks, pants, shirts and even staffs the lower classes try to become like you, as a result of which Iranian industries and handicrafts disappear just like those people who produce those goods. The populist gentlemen (*aqayan-e surat mardom*) preferred foreign fabrics to Iranian ones and they do not need the silk-makers of Yazd and Kashan. Iranian weavers wear themselves out to make the Iranian gentlemen purchase their goods and you are their leaders. Actually this sickness had spread a few years ago but did not receive widespread recognition.¹⁸² Also, if at least the notables (*'ayan va ashraf*) wore in wintertime the *'aba* produced in Na'in to protect themselves from the cold! But of course how funny would the Pahlavi hat appear with an *'aba*! An overcoat must be worn with it, or a jacket or a dressing gown! [...]. If it was only to protect yourselves from the cold and to stay warm it is possible to make both from the *'aba* produced in Na'in. But why bother? Instead it is easier to use the sacred cloth (*parcheh-e mobarak*) of whatever name which is produced by Monsieur Foreigner!¹⁸³

Following this harsh introduction Mohammad Ali then embarks upon explaining the plight of the silk-stuff makers of Yazd and the miseries of their families. However he was very careful to make sure his obedience to Reza Shah “the father of this bunch of helpless people, the Sultan who from the beginning ceaselessly worked for improving and developing the homeland and for removing the oppression coming from foreigners and their slaves inside the country (*zolm-e ajnab va ajnab parastan*)”. He then continued:

182 He sarcastically refers to the Law for the use of national clothes passed in 1923. The law made it compulsory for all state employees, including the military, to wear clothes produced of native fabrics and of Iranian make.

183 LMDCIP. d7/k155/j35.1/13, “To the Honourable Head of the National Assembly”, 17 January 1929.

So I spent my valuable time to write these lines and I am reminding you that “if you do not have religion do be free in your world”. [...]. Would it not be good if you behaved like pious people do, and work to make Iranians, from the lower and upper classes, from ordinary people to the notables, wear Iranian clothes produced in this country?

He then claims that from the previous New Year to the day when the petition was written twelve or fifteen thousand people migrated from Yazd. In the meantime he not only condemns the Uniform Dress Law but also the monopolization of the opium trade and several other measures. He finally requested the adoption of necessary measures to ensure the use of native clothes and to develop domestic industries. He signed the petition as “a friend of the Pahlavi”.

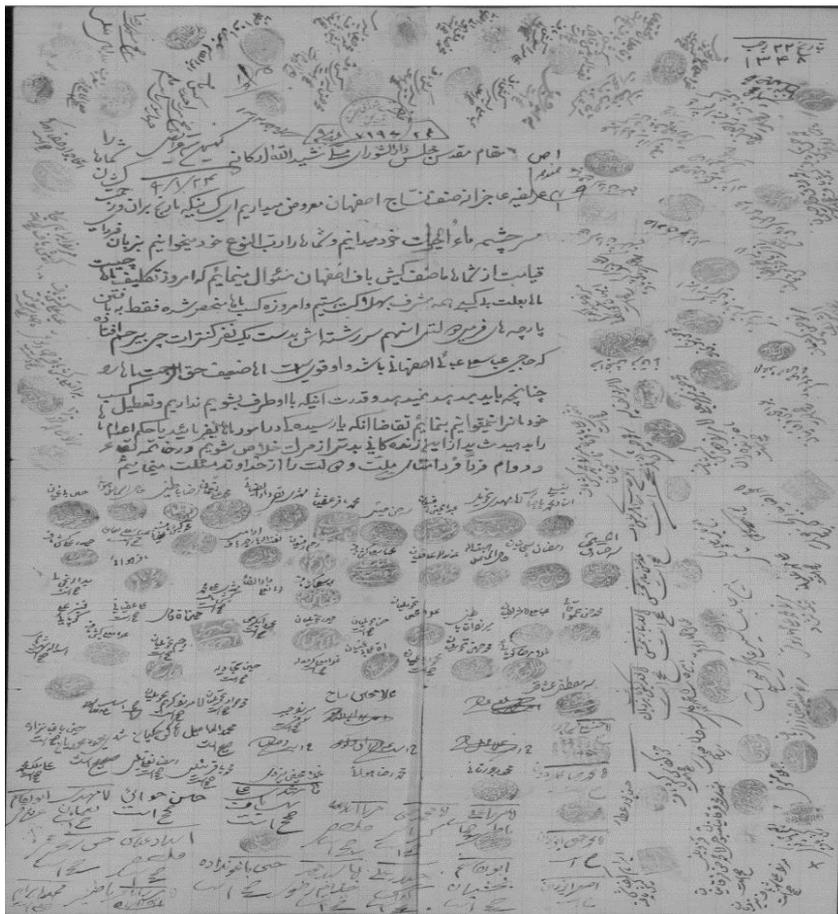
However, the case of Mohammad Ali of Yazd was rather exceptional. Usually the petitioners used deferential language to make their point, as the muslin weavers of Isfahan did. In a collective petition 24 December 1929 with hundreds of signatures on it, they complained of losing their livelihood and falling into misery because of the decline of their craft.¹⁸⁴ By employing a deliberately dramatic language they stated that their only source of income depended on weaving uniforms for state employees. However, they added that this business had lately been given out by a contract to a certain “merciless” contractor (*kontratchi*) named Haj ‘Abbas ‘Ali Esfahani who did not pay the craftsmen their wages and deprived them of their livelihoods. The workers argued that they neither had the power to confront Esfahani nor the intention of giving up their craft. The craftsmen then requested the following: “We call you to redress our grievance. If you want, you can order our execution and save us from this misery since in this situation death is better than living. Finally we pray to God to give you the trustees of the nation eternal fortune and support”.

Apparently, the official authorities worked with contractors for their orders for the sake of convenience, if for no other reason, and the latter mediated between the producers and the purchaser—in this case the local political establishment. This brought the craftsmen face to face with the ever-increasing penetration of state power into their lives and the threat posed by the nascent large scale industrial establishment. It is not known what workers meant by not receiving their wages. We may assume, however, that they either fulfilled their part of the contract but were denied their wages, or the contractor, Haj ‘Abbas ‘Ali Esfahani, subcontracted the order to some other individuals or to a company.

¹⁸⁴ LMDCIP. d7/k102/j14.2/p94, “To the Glorious Parliament”, 24 December 1929.

The reaction of the Majles reinforces the second possibility. In 22 April 1930 the President of the Majles responded to the petition by arguing that this case had been considered, but since trade was free in Iran no action could be taken about it.¹⁸⁵ It appears that upon this reaction from the Majles the workers tried their chance with the Ministry of National Economy but to no avail.

Figure 5: The petition of the muslin weavers of Isfahan who complain of deteriorating trade



Source: LMDICP. d7/k102/j14.2/94, 24 December 1929.

The ministry replied in in 25 May 1939 that the ministry did not compel the local authorities in Isfahan to continue their contract with Haj ‘Abbas ‘Ali Esfahani or not to make contracts with other individuals.¹⁸⁶ The petitioners then were advised to apply to the judicial authorities in Isfahan if they believed they incurred any losses because of the contractor.

¹⁸⁵ LMDICP. d7/k102/j14.2/ p94, “To Hajj Esma‘il Hava’i and the other Weavers of Isfahan”, 22 April 1930.

¹⁸⁶ LMDICP. d7/k102/j14.2/ p94, “To the Honourable Weavers’ Guild of Isfahan”, 25 May 1939.

Occasionally, the tension between the workers employed in craft industries and the nascent large scale industrial establishments become obvious, as in the case of the *barak* weavers of Isfahan.¹⁸⁷ In a petition dated 29 March 1930 they complained in the following words of their and their misery and depravation, which they argued was caused by the Vatan Factory:

To the Noble Presence of the Deputies of the Glorious Majles, May God Empower its Pillars,

As the representatives of the *barak* weavers of Sadahi [?] we the minor servants, Qadam Ali ‘Ala’i Sadahi and Mir Ali Mokhtari Sadahi, present the following. In this period the state and the deputies are struggling for the advancement of national production and of the guilds. The nation and the homeland chose the path of progress only in order to promote the national products and to develop the guilds (*asnaf*) and the industries of the country. Therefore the Government, the authorities and especially the deputies of the Majles should give equal consideration to the guildsmen, and the industrialists and should only care about the benefit of the country and the development of the guilds. They should not discriminate against any person at the expense of another since everyone enjoys the same rights in society. The labourer (*ranjbar*) and the millionaire are the same. We the *barak* weavers of Sadahi are over ten thousand people, and have taken the contract for the manufacturing of the overcoats for the armed forces in Southern Iran and produced them with our labour and elbow grease (*dast-ras va ranj*). Each piece of our finished products cost the state three tumans and can be used for three years.¹⁸⁸ Last year Vatan Factory obtained the contract for the same business and produced each piece for three tumans and a bit and could only be used for two years. When our products, as your servants, which are good for three years are compared with those of Vatan Factory which can be used only for two years the qualified people will confirm the tenacity of the former. Moreover since the main objective of the authorities is to promote national goods it should be considered that we are ten thousand citizens of the homeland (*ahl-e vatan*) while the owner of Vatan Factory is one individual. Also, once this

¹⁸⁷ Barak is a garment made of camel’s hair.

¹⁸⁸ Craftsmen were not alone in their unease from the preferential treatment given by the state to Vatan Factory despite the expensiveness of its products. For example the management of the Derakhshan Factory in Yazd complained in a petition dated 21 December 1935 that despite the fine and cheaper clothes they produced the circular order regarding the wearing of uniforms at schools advised students and teachers to purchase their clothes from Vatan Factory, or its branches in the provinces, as a result of which people were scared to buy them from anywhere else. NLAI. 297/6434, “From Derakshan Factory to the Ministry of Education”, 29 Azar 1314 (21 December 1935). Indeed in September 1929 the Ministry of Commerce issued a decree by which state officials working at all ministries were told to buy their clothes from Vatan Factory. *Habl al-Matin* (Calcutta) 24 September 1929. Quoted in Raja’i, 125. Also the uniforms of the street cleaners in Isfahan were made by Vatan Factory, Akhgar 14 September 1933. Quoted in Raja’i, 372. Prior to such critiques Vatan Factory was criticized for its expensive goods in 1931 by the 9th District of the Directory of Statistics and Records. After stressing delight of the employees of the Directory in the 9th district from the law regarding the uniform dress and their satisfaction with using native clothes, the reports criticized Vatan Factory as the only supplier of the necessary clothes in the region for selling them at excessive prices which the general populace could not afford. NLAI. 291/954, “From the 9th District of the Directory of Statistics and Records to the Governor of Isfahan”, 25 Esfand 1309 (16 March 1931). The report argued the quality of the goods produced by the factory was not so good and was lower than average imported European clothes despite their high prices. The report also added that within one month, the price of the clothes produced by this factory rose from three to five tumans.

state contract is taken from us we will disappear for we have no other craft or trade, but the owner of Vatan Factory does not need this contract at all as he can produce different clothes of various colours. If we take the state budget into account, our products reach the army for three tumans each, to be used for three years. Our business is patriotism, our business is progress-loving, and our business is proper since it not only serves the interests of the state but also saves the ten thousand citizens of the country (*nofus-e mellat*) from deprivation. Vatan Factory can produce different goods of various colours for the army. After all the peaceful decision rests with your noble presence may God prolong your fortune.¹⁸⁹

Upon not receiving any response to their case, the weavers sent after about three months another petition in which they reproduced the same account.¹⁹⁰ In this second petition written on behalf of “the ten thousand minor workers of the guild of *barak* weavers, both male and female” (*in chakeran-e karegaran-e senf-e barakbaf-e balegh bar dah hezar nofus az zan va mard*) the stress on labour was more deliberate. The petitioning workers particularly focused on the notion of the homeland (*vatan*) to counteract the Vatan Factory named to address the same patriotic feelings. Besides, as a discursive tool the workers explicitly presented the owner of the Vatan Factory as the sole beneficiary of the contract by dismissing altogether the hundreds of workers employed at the factory.

Throughout the 1930’s the state support for large scale industrial establishments in general and for the Vatan Factory in particular, along with foreign imports even as late as the mid-1930’s, continued to be held liable by the craft workers for the decline of their craft and their lost jobs as in the case of the cloak makers of Isfahan. In February 1934 they sent a petition in which they complained about the hardships they faced for the decline of their craft.¹⁹¹ They stated in the petition that after cloak making was no longer possible they started to produce different fabrics which also failed because of the cheaper imported fabrics. Thus they demanded the establishment of an institution where they would be educated to find themselves a sustainable job. Or else the cloak makers asked the government to order the police and other security forces to purchase from them part of the necessary clothes which they have been buying from Vatan Factory. The cloak makers also argued that the state could establish a company for the craftsmen and imports machine by which they could produce clothes.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ LMDCIP. d7/k102/j14.2/p89, “To the Glorious Parliament”, 29 March 1930

¹⁹⁰ LMDCIP. d7/k102/j14.2/p89, “To the Glorious Parliament, 22 June 1930”.

¹⁹¹ NLAI. 291/2480, “To the Honourable Governor of Isfahan”, 6 Esfand 1312 (25 February 1934).

¹⁹² The unrest was not limited to textile workers. Those workers employed at other industries also protested the establishment of factories which they argued replaced their crafts. A similar case was made by cigarette sellers in

Occasionally, workers lost their jobs due to the unintended consequences of the modernization policies of which the Uniform Dress Law is an example. In 12 July 1936 the drapers of Najafabad, a town in the Isfahan province, complained from their deteriorating business due to the Jewish peddlers from whom the veiled women who could not go out to the bazaars shopped.¹⁹³ They complained that such peddlers had no shops and were subject to no taxes. They in turn requested that those peddlers be ordered to hire shops and get involved in other businesses. According to the drapers since Najafabad was an agricultural town, men were busy working on the land while most of the transactions in the bazaars were undertaken by women who since the implementation of the unveiling law could not go out at all. In another petition dated 26 January 1937 the drapers operating at the bazaars in Isfahan complained of losing their livelihood again due to the Jewish peddlers.¹⁹⁴ They stated that due to the Uniform Dress Law the women who no longer could go out to the bazaars chose to shop from peddlers. Consequently, Isfahan women increasingly preferred this type of shopping. As a result the business of the drapers went from bad to worse. The drapers finally requested the prohibition of peddlers who were not subjects to any taxes or did not have shops of their own.

Factory workers too frequently complained about losing their jobs. Factory workers lost their jobs for a variety of reasons. Economic issues played a role but conflict with factory management was another reason for losing jobs. During the 1930's workers were somehow aware of the interventionist state role in industrialization and called the official authorities to their help in times of economic problems. The case of the three hundred and fifty former workers of the Khosravi Tannery in Tabriz attests to this point. The workers stated in a collective petition in June 1936, that they lost their jobs because of the financial difficulties and increased taxes which led the factory management to close its shoe-making department.¹⁹⁵ They stated that the department had been producing military boots and had to shut down due to the increased customs duties on the necessary chemicals. Therefore, they asked for the

a petition dated March 1932. According to what they read in newspapers, wrote the cigarette sellers, some merchants and other investors involved in cigarette selling imported a number of cigarette-cleaning machines, with a daily product equal to that of nearly a hundred workers. Although these machines did not yet work with full capacity the workers with their families, they argued, were in a state of decline. The cigarette-sellers then asked the Majles to show mercy to the workers and their families and saving them from this misery. LMDCIP. d8/k168/j6, "From the Cigarette Sellers", 3 March 1932.

¹⁹³ NLAI. 291/2581, "To the Governor of Isfahan", 21 Tir 1315 (12 July 1936).

¹⁹⁴ NLAI. 291/2581, "To the Glorious Governor of Isfahan", 6 Bahman 1315 (26 January 1937).

¹⁹⁵ LMDCIP. d/k107/j16, 26 June 1936.

removal of factory's financial difficulties in order to be able to get back to their work.¹⁹⁶ Consequently the factory was saved from its financial problems by army orders.¹⁹⁷

In an undated petition which probably belonged to the mid-1930's, the workers of Pashmbaf Factory in Isfahan complained of mistreatment and arbitrary practices by their manager. The workers criticized the powers granted to the factory management for the implementation of the adopted measures in the following words:

Currently the Pashmbaf Factory management fires a worker from the factory, who wasted years of his life for it, every day, through various pretexts and imaginary excuses. For this they receive no permission from official authorities. Three days ago a worker named Mohammad Ali Mohammadi employed at the spinning department was dismissed for no reason... Workers are worried from the possibility that such arbitrary decisions may in time turn into established practices among factory managers.¹⁹⁸

Sometimes the conflicts between the workers and the factory management were rather evident as in the case of the Zayandeh-Rud Factory in Isfahan. In an undated petition, probably from the late 1930's, the workers complained about the obstinate behaviour of the manager who allegedly introduced unfavourable working practices.¹⁹⁹ They argued that the manager increased the working day from eight to twelve hours; refused to pay the wages when workers had to wait for the repair of a broken machine although the common practice in other factories was payment of wages. Although in many instances we can follow the reaction of the authorities, in this case no such reply was attached to the file.

Unpaid Wages

Unpaid wages constituted another problem for which workers sent petitions. Such complaints mostly came from factory workers. The first case is from the Wool Spinning Factory in Mazandaran, northern Iran, which was established by the House of Industries (HI) to provide employment to needy women. In August 1921 three hundred female workers sent a petition to the Majles and to the Cabinet in which they asked for their unpaid wages for the last nine

¹⁹⁶ Consequently, the factory was saved by army orders. Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 132.

¹⁹⁷ Floor, *Labour and Industry*, 132.

¹⁹⁸ NLAI. 291/565 "To the Governorship of Isfahan, 1321 (1942).

¹⁹⁹ NLAI. 291/352, "The Attitude of the Manager of the Zayandehrud Factory towards the Workers", n.d.

months that they worked, before the factory was finally closed.²⁰⁰ They stated that they worked at the factory which was managed by an Armenian named Monsieur Mowl under utterly unfavourable conditions and that each of them had several orphans to take care of. In addition, they added that their previous appeals to various state authorities for a redress of their grievance did not yield any results. Finally after stating that they needed protection they wrote that the deputies should not accept that “the Iranian honour (*namusha-ye irani*) seeks protection from foreigners”. The petition was apparently forwarded by the Petitions Commission to the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Utilities which informed the Head of the Majles that HI was established in 1918 and was placed in 1920 under the authority of this ministry.²⁰¹ However according to the Ministry HI was subsequently relegated to the Tehran Municipality. Therefore, the Ministry suggested that the female workers had to appeal to the municipality. Three months later on 19 November 1921 the workers sent a second petition which addressed all of the deputies and in which woman workers reproduced the same account regarding the difficulties they had to face.²⁰² By using the same honour discourse they added “does your clemency allow you to leave a bunch of your women and honours (*avrat va navamis-e shoma*) without food and clothing?” Finally they stated that if their grievance was not redressed they would take sanctuary at Baharestan Square where the Majles was located.

Here the female workers appealed to the patrimonial feelings of the deputies and their role as the protectors of the nation. However, since the issue concerned previous years, Tehran Municipality denied any responsibility in the matter and stated that it concerned HI.²⁰³ Therefore, it was suggested that the workers should apply to Monsieur Mowl who was the previous manager of HI until it was abolished. Shortly afterwards the workers sent a third petition.²⁰⁴ The petition dated 12 December 1921 which addressed the President of the Majles, the Cabinet and the Petitions Commission provided further details as to their living conditions. The workers wrote that during the famine years between 1917 and 1919 Americans used to support them but as the famine ended they stopped their help as well. They

²⁰⁰ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2. “To the Glorious National Assembly and to the Honourable Members of the Cabinet”, August, 1921.

²⁰¹ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2. “From the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Utilities to the Head of the Majles”, 3 September 1921.

²⁰² LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2 ”To the Honourable Deputies of the Sacred Majles May God Endure their Power”, 19 November 1921.

²⁰³ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “From Prime Ministry to the Head of the Majles May God Endure its Fortune”, 30 November 1921.

²⁰⁴ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “To the Head of the Majles, the Cabinet and the Petitions Commission May God Endure their Fortune”, 12 December 1921.

then complained that their wages for the three months were 12 tumans for each. They also requested the sending of an inspector to inspect their miserable situation and verify their righteousness. This petition was followed by a response written by Monsieur Mowl who addressed the petitioning woman workers.²⁰⁵ He denied responsibility and argued that his “only desire was to help the helpless class (*tabaqah-e bicharegan*)”. According to him the responsibility rested with the Ministry of Commerce rather than with himself. However, for the women, seeking support from Monsieur Mowl was not an option for “there is a big difference between a woman who received twelve tumans a month and a manager whose monthly income is one hundred and fifty tumans”.²⁰⁶ The result of the case is not clear from the documents, as in the case of a former worker of the Hamadan branch of the British owned East Carpet Factory who complained in September 1926 that after twelve years of service at the factory part of his wage had remained unpaid.²⁰⁷ For this he applied to the factory but to no avail. He then applied to the Governorship of Hamadan but they rejected help since the factory was owned by the British. The worker then applied to the British Consulate in the city and was advised to apply to the judicial authority of Hamadan.

Concluding Remarks

From the inception of the constitutional system in 1906 until 1931 when the anti-communist law came into effect, Iranian workers took part in several strikes that characterized this period. Those workers employed in the services sector, such as telegraph employees and tramway workers, were among the first to launch collective actions which gradually received acceptance among those working in other industries. Nonetheless it is safe to argue that at any rate the greater part of the workforce in Iran remained non-organized until the end of the period under study. The insignificant number of large-scale industries, lack collective action amongst craft workers and the primarily political-oriented agendas of the leftist organizations determined the course of labour activism in this period. The unstable political atmosphere, foreign intervention, and the eruption of First World War politics, narrowly defined, and security issues further distracted attention from the growing labour issues. Once the war was over labour actions experienced a major increase. With the state’s ever-increasing grip over

²⁰⁵ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “To the Woman Workers of the House of Industries”, n.d.

²⁰⁶ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “To the Head of the Majles, the Cabinet and the Petitions Commission May God Endure their Fortune”, 12 December 1921.

²⁰⁷ LMDCIP. d4/k25/j12/p2, “To the Honourable Parliament”, 20 September 1926.

the political, social and economic fields especially from the establishment of the Pahlavi regime in 1925 onwards, the frequency and the number of labour actions suffered an obvious setback. As the government forbade trade unions, especially CCFTU, 150 labour organizers were arrested between 1927 and 1932.²⁰⁸ Also upon the forced retirement of Solayman Eskandari the Socialist party had dissolved with its clubs having been burnt down by organized mobs.²⁰⁹ The recently adopted position of the Communist Party of Iran towards Reza Shah and the existing political establishment was one of the main reasons for the government's uncompromisingly hostile attitude towards leftist movements. First in the party's Second Congress in Urmieh in 1927 and then in the Third International in Moscow ten months later the 1921 coup was described as a British plot and the Shah was denounced as an imperialist stooge.²¹⁰ Moreover, the Congress also called for a revolution of "peasants, workers, and national capitalists".²¹¹

The anti-socialist and anti-communist feelings apparently found echoes in the provinces, or else they were used as discursive tools to outmanoeuvre political rivals. The following petition sent from the workers and guilds union in Kerman in August 1927 provides an interesting example of this:²¹²

To the Sacred Majles May God Empower its Pillars,

As the people of Kerman we have been waiting for the appointment of proper, pious and respectful members (*'aza-ye saleh va anaser-e ba diyanat va abrumand*) to the ranks of the judiciary as the shelter of our honour and property (*navamis va amval*). This way we would benefit from righteous judges with a sense of duty. This would not only enable the consolidation of a judicial power in the country and people would enjoy security and justice but we could also swell with pride for having qualified judicial authorities with a sense of duty in a time when our state stood up against several states and abolished capitulations. Unfortunately the situation is far from this. We hear that the new members of the judiciary are people who lack piety and honour as well as religion and proper behaviour (*nah alaqamandi beh diyanat va haysiyat darand va nah mazhab va sehhat-e 'amal*). In addition, they are all from the Qajars and socialists with hostility and enmity to the people of Kerman. [...] The people of Kerman express their hatred towards the nomination to

²⁰⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 139.

²⁰⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 139.

²¹⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 139. The Congress was actually held in Ivanova near Moscow in the autumn 1927. Y. Eftekhari, *Khaterat-e duran-e separi shodeh: Khaterat va asnad-e Yusof Eftekhari, 1299 ta 1329*. Kaveh Bayat & M. Tafrahi (eds.) (Tehran, 1370/1991), 28-29. Quoted in Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 89.

²¹¹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 139

²¹² LMDCIP. d6/k49/j23.2/p131, "To the Sacred Majles May God Empower its Pillars", 7 August 1927.

judicial posts of such people as Mahmu[d] Dargahi, Dehgan, and Mo'in al-Shari'eh, and Soleyman Mirza Qajar Kermani, and Monshizadeh, and Golestani.²¹³

In the rest of the petition the supplicants asked for the dismissal of these people. Nonetheless, the end of leftist organizations and of collective labour activism did not mean the end of labour activism as such. True, during the factory-based industrial leap-forward of the 1930's labour issues remained a peripheral concern.²¹⁴ No more than sporadic and unsystematic attempts were made to regulate workers' working and living conditions. However, during the same period workers gradually developed a language of their own which was not confrontational but served to make their demands and complaints adequately clear. It appears that the number of the petitions, both individual and collective, was a lot higher during the 1930's than before. Petitioning served during this period as "a privileged communicative space" in which not transparency but dissimulation served as the main discursive tool for workers.²¹⁵ Workers' discourse "intended to be ambiguous, to have a double meaning, to be garbled so that they cannot be treated as a direct, open challenge and, hence, invite an equally direct, open retaliation".²¹⁶ In most cases, a relatively harsh criticism from the part of the workers was almost immediately softened in the following line and a clear line was cleverly drawn between the Shah and the lower authorities. Loyalty was so overly stressed in petitions that no room was left for a suspicion of rebellion or open confrontation. These petitions provide insights into the living and working conditions of the Iranian textile workers, as others, as they also help us reconstruct the relationships between workers and the political establishment.

²¹³ Dehgan should be the famous labour activist, the president of CCFTU who presented Iran in the Third International. Sulayman Mirza was apparently Sulayman Mizra Iskandari.

²¹⁴ The pace of industrialization decelerated from 1938 onwards due either to the fear of overproduction or governmental attempt to limit profits. Bharier, *Economic Development*, 174.

²¹⁵ 'A privileged communicative space' is taken from D. Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion in the English Revolution", *American Journal of Sociology*, 101 (1996), pp. 1497-1555. Here 1512. Quoted in Ken Lunn & Ann Day, "Deference and Defiance: The Changing Nature of Petitioning in British Naval Dockyards", in Lex Heerma Van Voss, ed., *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement 9 Petitions in Social History (2001): 131-150. Here 132.

²¹⁶ James Scott, "Everyday Form of Resistance", *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, V. 4 (1989): 55.