

## COMINTERN'S EASTERN POLICY AND IRAN (1919-1943)

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The Communist International, or *Comintern*, was an international organization famous for its exceptional role in ideological, social and national liberation movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With 25 years of political activities, the organization's involvement was not confined to the social developments of the 1920s-30s; its subsequent activities were also remarkable for organization's contribution to the elaboration of theoretical and political principles and the development of world political process. Set up in 1919 by adherents of Communist ideology – revolutionary wing of the international social-democratic movement, the organization played a part of “universal world revolutionary party” guided by principles of “world socialist revolution” both in its strategy and tactics.

Note that the Comintern's eastern policy was also based on the same principles. The 2nd Congress of Comintern adopted V. I. Lenin's “Theses on Nationalities and Colonies Question” as theoretical basis for its eastern policy having submitted it to the Left and revolutionary organizations of the East as a program of action. The principles of this policy were based on Lenin's theoretical concept on the transition of advanced proletariat-assisted backward countries to the Soviet system and subsequently to Communism, omitting Capitalism. To accomplish this strategic goal, it was essential to cope with 3 key tasks: to create local Communist Parties in eastern countries; to enter into temporary alliance with local national-liberation forces as a key factor in the struggle of eastern peoples against imperialist states and then transform them into Communist movement; to unite already – Sovietized Republics of the East into the Federation.

Emphasis being laid on the entire eastern world notwithstanding, Comintern focused in 1920-1921 on the Near Eastern region, specifically on South Caucasus, Iran and Turkey. Guided by the principles of the restoration of the former Russian Empire, the newly established Soviet state had much in common with goals and programs of the “world revolution-racked” Comintern. Note that Comintern’s chief task was to create “exemplary Soviet Republics” out of Caucasian countries – Georgia, Armenia and, in the first turn, “oil” Azerbaijan to thus impress the entire eastern world and benefit by intensifying national-liberation movements in Iran and Turkey. In September 1920, the 1st Congress of Eastern Peoples was held in the already – Sovietized Azerbaijan’s capital of Baku. Attending the Congress were 2050 representatives of 45 nationalities. The Congress proved to be momentous and mass event in the Comintern’s eastern policy to set and tackle with specific political tasks.

It would be appropriate to note that the first faint note of criticism and agitation and ensuring antagonism due to the eastern policy of Comintern in the Sovietized outlying districts of the former Russian Empire were heard at the Congress. However, Comintern’s leaders did scorn malcontents’ opinion. At the same time, regardless of the results of the Congress, the latter proved to be a great event not only in the history of Comintern but also in the social, political and revolutionary thought of eastern peoples in the period under consideration. On the other hand, the historical role of the 1st Congress of Eastern Peoples cannot be confined to its propaganda mission only. The Congress’ executive body – Propaganda and Action Council for Eastern Peoples was responsible for the resolution of Comintern eastern policy-related strategical and technical issues. Note that Comintern’s interference in the developments in South Caucasian Republics, Iran, Turkey and Crimea was attributable to the activities of the said Council.

It has to be kept in mind that Iran turned out the first testing area of Comintern’s eastern policy. The explanation lay in the fact that

Iran had advantageous conditions available to convert the East-related Comintern's experiment into a fact. First of all, the first Iranian Left, Social-democratic and, finally, Communist organizations arose among hundreds of thousands of Iranian workers engaged in Baku oil-fields, famous for their great working class and revolutionary traditions. Being actively involved in the Russian social and political process in close collaboration with Russian Communists, more advanced and politically active Iranian workers were successful in setting up independent Communist organizations in 1920 and turning into a branch of Comintern. Inspired by the successful attempts of the 9th Russian Red Army in Sovietizing Azerbaijan, both Iranian and Azerbaijani Communists with the purpose of "proceeding with the world revolution" started to propagandize the same ideas in Iran. Widely spread national-liberation movements in Iran prepared the favorable ground for Comintern's eastern concept to be realized in practice. Failing to arrange things with the Khyabani-led national-liberation movement in South Azerbaijan, Comintern leaders succeeded in entering into "a temporary agreement" with leader of the Gilan national-liberation movement Mirza Kichik-khan. Taking utterly radical, Left stand on socio-political issues, Iranian Communists pursued social transformations of society that seriously displeased local population and national revolutionary forces. Relying on material, military and moral support on the part of Soviet Russia and Soviet Azerbaijan, Left forces of Iran managed to arrange a Communist coup in Gilan in summer 1920 and seized power in this province of the country. Archives are indicative that the power of "Iranian Communists", primarily made of Comintern agents and Caucasian Bolsheviks, fell to the ground 20 days later to have grave consequences for the destiny of the nation.

In considering the danger of the failure of revolutionary perspectives in Soviet Russia itself and the East and the bitter experience, the leaders of the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks and Comintern took appropriate steps to remedy the situation. Note that Comintern's experts on the East were divided into two wings –

the so-called “pure Communists”, on the one hand, and advocates of “exceeding the limits of theory for achievement of ultimate aim”, on the other. As a result, the latter prevailed. Early in 1921, another group of Comintern-backed Iranian Communists – the Communist Party of Iran headed by Heydar Amioglu started its activities in the country. A new political-theoretical line of Heydar as agreed with Comintern bore its desirable results. The number of Party branches within the country grew together with the growth of its prestige, publication of printed matter, restoration and development of the relations with other leaders of the national-liberation movement. However, the then Soviet government made radical changes in its Iranian policy: official Moscow concluded a friendly agreement with Shah government of Iran and undertook commitments “to put an end to Gilan revolution”.

Looking through “top secret” materials makes it possible to imagine the complex, contradictory situation in Iran in the surveyed period, antagonistic approaches of Comintern and the Soviet State toward Iran. It also throws light on mechanisms of betraying revolutionary principles of Comintern and Gilan to please political and state interests of Soviet Russia.

It has to be kept in mind that as distinct from the Soviet State, the leaders of Soviet Azerbaijan adhered to a different political line as regards Gilan events. Historical facts indicate that Azerbaijan aspired to come out as an independent political force in its eastern policy. It should be noted that the relations between Comintern and Iran in 1920-1921 were full of contradictory developments. Failure of Comintern’s eastern political line in Iran and Turkey, on the one hand, and the progress in Sovietization of South Caucasian Republics of Armenia and Georgia, on the other hand, led to the lessening of Comintern’s excessive interest in the region. At the same time, it was the maturing of Chinese revolution that again arrested Comintern’s attention on Far Eastern region.

Note that in 1922-1927, the eastern line in Comintern’s strategy remained to be a key factor. Comintern’s Congresses and plenums of that period repeatedly touching upon the eastern question

notwithstanding, the said policy underwent no serious changes laying an emphasis on “acting as a united front” jointly with national revolutionary forces. The Iran-related political line of the period under consideration reflected many-sided nature of the relations between Comintern and the Communist Party of Iran, Comintern’s place in intra-Party debates, Party’s activities countrywide, etc. At the same time, the said period was noted for the creation of the Soviet Iranian Studies school by common efforts of former Comintern experts, Soviet diplomats who previously worked in Iran, Iranian Communists, etc. It has to be kept in mind that works by prominent representatives of this scientific school, their proposals had a direct effect on the formation of Comintern’s policy toward Iran, activities of Iranian Communists. Of particular importance were discussions and specific Comintern’s instructions arising from Reza-shah Pahlavi’s dictatorship in the country.

Commencing from late 1927 – early 1928, some changes occurred in the general political line of Comintern: “united front” tactics was substituted for “confrontation of class against class” approach. Arising from some objective and subjective factors, new milestones in Comintern’s political course increasingly restrained activities of Communist Parties of the East, including Iran. Noteworthy is the fact that as a Comintern’s branch, the Communist Party of Iran also adopted this tactics in its political activity. Suffice it to say that the 2nd Urmiya Congress of the CPI was held under the “confrontation of class against class” slogan. The 6th Congress of Comintern officially adopted this political line which found its parallel in CPI’s subsequent activities. Note that the 1929-1933 Iranian Communists activities’ both positive and negative achievements came as a result of Comintern’s instructions. Side by side with evident successes in arranging workers’ and trade unions’ strikes, Iranian Communists, guided by the “confrontation of class against class” tactics sustained a defeat in their struggle for popular masses’ sympathies, brought to naught their collaboration with other revolutionary forces and organizations of Iran. As a consequence,

Iranian Communists turned out alienated from all the progressive forces of the country. In such a contingency, the Reza-shah's dictatorship was successful in suppressing Iranian Communists through the policy of persecutions, imprisonment and terror. By mid-1930s, the ruling regime had actually done away with Communist activity in the country.

In the 1930s, it was the publication of printed matter in West European countries that constituted one of the directions in Iranian Communists' activities. "Sitareye sorkh" magazine and particularly "Peykar" newspaper, issued due to the collaboration between the CPI and young Iranian patriots-students of the Western educational institutions, played an important role in the history of the Iranian Communist movement; at the same time, among students there were ones, not closely related to Comintern and its ideas, yet, representing a new generation of Iranian Communists. It was a group of young Communists that started issuing "Dunya" magazine in Teheran in the said period. In 1937, these people were arrested and later repressed by the government of Reza-shah during the so called "trial of 53". In early 1940s, those who survived laid the foundation of a new leftist-Marxist party – People's Party of Iran, or the *Tudeh* Party".

It should be remembered that an overwhelming majority of Iranian Communists, who migrated to the Soviet Union in the 1930s and settled down here later, were exterminated in this "homeland of Communism". Note that in mid-1920s the Soviet government pursued a policy of converting foreigners, including Iranians, into the Soviet citizenship; later on those declining from the Soviet citizenship as members of the CPI and later – members of the local Republican Communist Parties fell victims to the Stalin repression of 1937-1938. The monograph refers to names of all prominent Iranian Communist Party leaders together with ordinary members, including those who migrated to Soviet Russia, Azerbaijan and Central Asian Republics, leaders and participants of the Iranian national-liberation and revolutionary movements who were all imprisoned, exiled or executed. From this point of view, we have every reason to say that

from 1919 through 1930s the older generation of Iranian Communists who actively collaborated with Comintern (except for Communists left who to rot in Reza-shah goals), was completely exterminated in the Soviet Union, as witnessed by archival documents.

The historical experience is illustrative that irrespective of achievements and setbacks of Comintern and Iranian Communists, there were neither historical-political, nor economic-cultural-ideological grounds for Communism as social system to establish itself in Iranian society. Such a conclusion arises from the very ideological and political nature of Comintern – “world revolution” which was adverse to the very essence of social development and had no grounds at all to be realized in practice. On the other hand, opposing it were Iranian own distinctive national, social, religious and cultural features.

At the same time, it'd be wrong to underestimate the contribution of Comintern and the CPI to the spreading of common-to-all mankind humanistic ideas of liberty, social justice, equality and solidarity in the country. Thus, as an adherent of the world social revolution Comintern set itself an aim not only to involve separate countries and especially “awakened Asian peoples” into the revolutionary process but also protect social, economic and political interests of working masses. It should be noted that ordinary people in the East, including Iran, were illiterate, uneducated, so they accumulated a great experience in theory and practice of political struggle, represented independent political and ideological tendencies in society's development. Together with some negative and even tragic aspects in its activities, Comintern played a positive role in Iran's policy.

The conclusion of the monograph traces back the heir of Comintern traditions – Soviet State's interference with 1940 through 1980s developments in Iran. Note that in the 1950s the concept of the “world revolution” was substituted for the “uniform world revolutionary process” idea, later realized in the form of theoretical, political and military aggression of the Soviet Union against

Afghanistan in 1979. It also examines the role of these developments in the failure of the CPSU policy and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union. The author investigates perspectives of socialist ideology worldwide, throws light on the content and significance of the history and experience of Comintern under new circumstances – development of present-day capitalism and concomitant globalization.

## **Х ц л а с я**

### **КОМИНТЕРНИН ШЯРГ СИЙАСЯТИ ВЯ ИРАН (1919-1943)**

*Солмаз РЦСТЯМОВА-ТОЩИДИ*

Коммунист Интернационалы в я йа Коминтерн 20-ъи ясрдя инсанларын идеолозийасында, социал щяйатда в я азадлыг щярякатында ойнадыы хцуси ролуна эоря мяшщур иди. 25 ил сийаси фяалийят эюстярян бу тяшкилат йалныз 20-30-ъу иллярдя дцнйанын сийаси-социал инкишафындакы ящямийятли ролуна эоря дейил, бцтцн сонракы дюврлярдя Коминтернин сийаси-нязари янянляринин щяля дя йашамасы в я дцнйа сийасятиндя тязашцр етмеси бахымындан сон дяряъя мараглы в я актуалдыр.

1919-ъу илдя коммунист идеолозийасы тяряфдарларынын йаратдыы бу тяшкилат щям стратегийа, щям дя тактикасында “дцнйа социалист ингилабынын” принциплари иля долу олан “Дцнйа ингилаби цмуми партийасынын” бир щиссяси иди.

Нязря алын ки, Коминтернин Шярг сийасяти дя ейни принципларя яасланыр. Коминтернин ЫЫ Конгреси В.И. Ленинин “Милли в я мцстямлякя мясяляляриня даир тезислярини” гябул етди. Бу тезис солчу в я Шяргин ингилаби тяшкилатларына фяалийят програмы кими тягдим едилди.

Сийаси тезисин яасларыны Ленинин инкишаф етмиш фящля синфиня малик олан эеридя галмыш юлкялярин совет системиня в я



сонра коммунизма кечмяк вь капитализмдьян имтина етмяк нязяриййяси тяшкил едирди.

Бу стратеги мягсядя чатмаг цццн 3 мясяляни щялл етмяк мцщцм сайылырды: 1) Шярг юлкяляриндя йерли Коммунист Партийалары йаратмаг; 2) йерли милли-азадлыг гцввяляри иля иттифага эирмяк (Бунунла шярглилярин империализма гаршы мцбаризясиндя вь коммунист цярякатына кечиддя мцщцм иш эюрцлмцш олур); 3) Шяргин артыг советляшмиш республикаларыны Федерасийага гябул етмяк.

1920-1921-ъи иллярдя Коминтерн ясаян Йахын Шяргдя, хцсуслия Ъянуби Гафгаз, Иран вь Тцркийядя мяркъязляшмишди. Кечмиш Рус империйасынын бярпасы принциплярини ясас тутан йени Совет дювляти йарадылды. Коминтернин ясас мягсяди Гафгаз дювлятляриндян – Эцръцстан, Ермянистан вь биринъи нювбядя нефт Азярбайъанындан – нцмуняви дювлят йаратмаг иди.

1920-ъи ил илин сентйабрында шярг халгларынын илк конгреси артыг Совет Азярбайъаны олмуш республиканын пайтахты Бақыда кечирилди. Конгресдя 45 миллиян 2050 нцмайяндяси иштирак етди. Шярг халгларынын Ы Конгресинин тарихи ролу тьякъя онун тьяблият миссийасы олмады. Конгресин башчысы Шярг халгларынын Тьяблият вь Фяалийят Консулу Коминтернин стратеги вь техники мясяляляр цзря Шярг сийасятинин йериня йетирилмясиня мясулиййятли олду.

Русийанын социал вь сийаси просесляри иля баълы олан, рус коммунистляри иля ямякдашлыг едян габагъыл вь сийаси тьящятдян фяал Иран фящляляри 1920-ъи илдя мцстягил коммунист тьяшкилатыны йаратдылар. Бу да Коминтернин бир голуна чеврилди. Гызыл Ордунун Азярбайъана дахил олмасындан сонра Иранда да коммунист тьяблияты башлады.

Тарихи фактлар эюстярир ки, Коминтернин Иран вь Тцркийядя щяйата кечирдийи Шярг сийасятинин мяълубиййяти, Ъянуби Гафгаз Республикаларында коммунист режиминин инкишафына бахмайараг, Коминтернин мараъыны бу реэионда азалтды.

1922-1927-ъи иллярдя Коминтернин стратегийасында шярг хятти ясас олараг галды. *Yadda saxlamaq lazımdır ki, İran коммунистлярин бюйцк якъсяриййяти 1930-ъу илдя Совет Иттифагына имигрантлар кими эяляряк бурада мяскунлашдылар. Онлар “коммунизм мяканында” мящв едилдиляр. 1920-ъи илин орталарында Совет*

щюкумяти бурада йашайан яънябияри, о ъцмлядян дя иранлылары, совет вятяндашлыыны гябул етмяйя тящрик етди. Сонралар Республикаларын Коммунист партийаларынын цзвяри 1937-1938-џи иллярдя Сталин репресийасынын гурбаны олдулар.

Тарихи тяърцбя эюстярди ки, мцяййян наилиййятлярин ялдя едилмясиндян асылы олмайараг, Коминтернин вя Иран коммунистляри эери отурдулду, чцнки Иран џямиййятиндя коммунизм цчцн ня тарихи-сийаси, ня дя игтисади-мядяни-идеоложи зямин йох иди.