

**Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution**, Misagh Parsa, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989, xiii + 348 pp., \$40.00, cloth. \$15.00, paperback.

The Iranian revolution of February 1979 constitutes one of the twentieth century's most popular, turbulent, and controversial revolutions. Broadly speaking, in the twelve years that has since passed, two dominant schools of thought have emerged on the causes of that revolution. The first views the revolution from the vantage point of political economy, highlighting such factors as rapid modernization, uneven development, emergence of new social classes and class struggle. The second approach emphasizes cultural and ideological factors, notably the rise of politicized Islam, Iranians' disenchantment with the West, uprootedness of certain segments of the population and their search for a new cultural identity.

Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution presents an eloquent version of the first approach, albeit in a theoretically modified form. The author is strongly influenced by the works of such theorists of revolution as Charles Tilly and Jeffery Page. Tilly's resource mobilization theory of collective action suggests that revolutions must be studied in terms of the structure of power, and the mobilization process as well as the correlation between the two. The emphasis, moreover, is on such determinants as interests, organization, solidarity structures, and opportunity for action. Parsa supplements Tilly's model with Page's structural theory of the state which accords importance to the configuration as well as course of class conflict. Hence at the very outset of the book he claims to "explain the social causes of the Iranian revolution" through "a structural theory of collective action and revolution" (pp. xi-xii).

By combining these agent-centered theories of collective action and political conflict, Parsa develops his own two by two theoretical matrix to explain Iranian as well as other Third World revolutions. He maintains that the probability of revolutionary conflict is greatest when and where the state's active intervention in capital allocation and accumulation coincides with high consolidation level on the part of adversely affected classes and groups (p. 13). After articulating his theoretical paradigm and providing a historical overview of the major political conflicts in Iran since the Constitutional Revolution, the author proceeds to an examination of the state's accumulation policies as well as the collective actions of certain adversarial groups. He maintains that thanks to the rapidly augmenting oil revenues in the 1960s and 1970s, the state became the main economic actor in the Iranian society whereby it progressively intervened in the capital allocation and accumulation process and hence politicized the economy. Meanwhile, this process along with the Shah's authoritarian style of leadership adversely affected a variety of groups, classes and constituencies (the bazaaris, the industrial workers, the white-collar urbanites, the secular and the Islamic forces). Chief among these were the bazaaris (merchants, shopkeepers, artisans) who faced the state's indisputable preference for industrial capital over merchant capital as well as large, modern enterprises over small, traditional ones. These discriminations along with the Shah's increasing dependence on Western powers in the aftermath of the 1953 coup were antithetic to the two major interests of the bazaaris, namely nationalist economic policies and a liberal political system. The bazaaris rightfully identified and targeted the state as the concrete social entity responsible for their suffering. The latter's ill-designed anti-

profiteering campaign and increasing taxation could not but further alienate an already estranged constituency.

Parsa contends that the bazaaris were the single most important agents of the revolution who were propelled to the forefront of the struggle through their recurrent and effective displays of collective action. Utilizing Tilly's four determinant variables of mobilization, he maintains that they possessed certain unique advantages that could not be matched by any other opposition group. First of all the two principal interests of the bazaaris were all-encompassing enough to be shared by other segments of the population. This is evident by their ability to forge alliances with other groups and classes (with the clergy and the intellectuals during the Constitutional and the 1979 revolutions and with the National Front during the 1950s and the 1960s). Secondly, they were able to effectively "borrow" the only autonomous and safe channel of organization, networking and mobilization operating on a national scale, the mosques. Finally, their numerical strength, spatial concentration, independent economic base, collective interests, financial largess and strong leverage over the country's domestic trade and credit system enabled them to solidify their ranks, paralyze the economy, mobilize the masses and challenge the state when they so desired.

Parsa maintains that the rest of the opposition forces suffered from a variety of weaknesses. Some had succumbed to repression (National Front) or were severely handicapped by it (Fedayeen, Tudeh and the working class). Still others suffered from their unsuitable economic or political platforms (rejection of private property and Marxist ideology) or tactics (quietism or armed struggle). Most of them, though, had restricted resources, lacked broad based independent organizations, appealed to small constituencies and/or were deprived of national public forums.

While Parsa's collective action model, with its fairly exhaustive data, goes a long way in repudiating the already discredited modernization, conspiracy or hijacked theories of revolution it still leaves much to be desired. His social structural paradigm does not satisfactorily discuss the role of Islamic ideology, a hallmark of the revolution, or its hegemonic ascendancy. Some of the salient features of the Iranian revolution such as the use of religion as the primary agency of political mobilization, Khomeini's charisma, the populist discourse of much of the left and Islamic forces, the unprecedented level of animosity displayed against the West, the blending of religious folklore and idioms with a secularly oriented political culture and the failure of the ideological apparatuses of the state in mobilizing the masses are too readily ignored or inadequately treated. Furthermore, the key chapter of the book on the bazaar fails to convince the reader that (s)he has come away with a thorough understanding of the bazaar's socioeconomic web or its traditional urban culture. The reader is left alone with the lingering question of why is it that despite their evident resourcefulness the bazaaris have yet failed to produce leadership cadres in par with those of the clergy or the secularly minded middle class.

The book is marred by a number of typographical mistakes, omissions in the index and too many redundant statements. As one example consider the following two statements: "... no group suffered as much torture or as many deaths as did the Fedayeen" (p. 181); "No other political

organization [speaking of the Fedayeen] suffered comparable losses prior to the revolution." (p. 183)

Despite these shortcomings, the author has to be commended for his theoretically sophisticated analysis and richly detailed account of popular collective actions in contemporary Iran.

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