

there. But I was getting a great deal of anti-Shah sentiment and comment from old Peace Corps friends. People who knew me not as the American consul, but just as an old friend. From them a lot of anti-Pahlavi comment, a lot of anti-Shah feeling.

Q: Now the instructions did not make a point about making contacts with the traditional social classes and strata, the bazaari middle classes, the clerics. Did you develop contacts with those?

Metrinko: I had a lot of friends who were in the bazaar certainly. But the bazaar-- it's not so easy to put-- I mean, we talk about the structure of Iranian society as though it's rigid. It is a very loose flowing structure. Someone who is in the bazaar might have a brother who is a policeman, might have another brother who is a member of the clergy, might have a nephew who is an academic and might have a son who is studying in America, might have a cousin who is in the military. Families were not at all that rigid socially.

Because I was out almost every night or had Iranians into my home, either one or the other almost every day, I knew people in just about every category except for the clergy. I met clergymen occasionally, but my attempts to get to meet some of the others, the leading clerical figures of the city, to get into some of the mosques, were absolutely unsuccessful.

Q: You made an effort though?

Metrinko: I made an effort. I was told immediately that I would not be welcomed. And as a matter of fact, one of the uglier aspects of Shi'ite Islam as practiced in Iran is that basically foreigners were not allowed physically to go into the mosques. In general. This is not true of the major tourist mosques in Isfahan perhaps. It was certainly true in every small town, every smaller city. You could not go into one. And the attempts that I made to meet some of the clergy were simply not successful.

Q: Now back in '75 the Shah had established a one-party system, controlled by the Rastakhiz, a resurgence party. How did this organization manifest itself in Tabriz? Or to what extent did it manifest itself in the area?

Metrinko: Let's see. Tabriz had a Rastakhiz headquarters. I knew a couple of different people who had been directors of the Rastakhiz Party there. They were basically-- how do I say this? The Rastakhiz Party I never took seriously as any sort of political expression. It was basically a way for the ass kissers to continue kissing ass. It had no political role other than to serve as a rubber stamp for the Shah. The membership was totally artificial. The leadership was not elected or selected by anyone other than the Shah and his closest advisers. The positions in

the party itself, as far as I could see, were simply sinecures or temporary assignments for people to earn money. There was no expression of political fervor or belief, and I met a fair number of the leaders of the party, either in Tehran or in Tabriz. None of them were-- that I can think of offhand, were noted particularly for their political acumen or their patriotism or their willingness to serve Iran or anything else. It was just another job.

No one was a fervid or fervent follower of Rastakhiz. It just would have been absurd to think of it in those terms. It didn't attract anybody who was interested in either idealism or serving his country or anything else.

Q: Apparently earlier, I guess in the mid-seventies, it was used to some extent as a sort of policing mechanism, to control prices in the bazaar. Was that kind of thing going on while you were there?

Metrinko: The one example I can think of where it really impinged on the daily life of people is that during the huge construction boom, the Rastakhiz Party, at least in Tabriz, was given the right to assign cement quotas from government production. This was a wonderful opportunity, of course, for graft and corruption on the part of the people who were able to decide who would get cement, other than that--

It's, I think, rather noteworthy that the Rastakhiz Party

headquarters was one of the first buildings attacked in the first demonstration in Tabriz. It was a disliked organization, which had nothing at all to do with the aspirations or the political life of the people.

Q: Now around the time you arrived in Iran in '77, the country's economic managers I think were trying to cool down the economy in order to deal with the inflationary problems created by the oil boom in the seventies. Did this cooling off process have any kind of an impact in Tabriz? In think in other cities there was higher unemployment in the course of '77.

Metrinko: It's difficult to say. There was always a great deal of unemployment in Iran. The employment structure there, the family structure, the basic economic units are different than what we have here. People would live together in larger groups and one person could be responsible for far more people economically than would be the case in the United States. If you walked out into any major city in Iran at any time of the day or evening, there would be huge crowds of men walking the streets sort of aimlessly. There was a great deal of unemployment. Life at the same time was very expensive. I think the people who were unemployed-- and I don't have any figures, you could simply see this on the streets if you walked out, hundreds or thousands of employable bodies were just walking and staring at shop windows and going into the cinemas in the middle of work days. I assume

that this disparity between lack of work and the high cost of living was met simply by sacrifice and sort of low living standards.

The crowds of unemployed-- or the crowds of under-employed, if you prefer-- of course were wonderful fuel for the revolution once it started.

Q: Now I guess later in '77, that fall, there were anti-Shah demonstrations at the campuses in Tehran. Were there any protests at the University of Tabriz?

Metrinko: The University of Tabriz was basically closed from late 1977 up through the revolution, and, you know, through 1979. It would be open for a couple of weeks, closed again for a month or two, open, closed, open, closed. But it was basically closed all through 1978, and when it did open there would be demonstrations or trouble and it would close again.

Q: So there had been protests in '77?

Metrinko: Yes. There had been protests. They weren't talked about a great deal. But it was already a non-functioning educational system. At least higher education.

That's one of the reasons, by the way, that so many young Iranians wanted to come to the United States to study. If you were to stay in Iran and try and complete your four years of

university education, you could assume it would take six to seven years for the four-year period, just because schools were going to be closed. They were closed when I was there in the Peace Corps in the universities, in the earlier seventies. They continued to be closed off and on during the mid-seventies. Certainly by the later seventies they were closed frequently. And if you were a serious student and could afford to get out of the country, you did it. If you wanted to finish the university. Otherwise it was an open-ended prospect. It was also true for Turkish schools at the same time and for other universities. We have a luxury in the United States. We know here that if you start school, four years later you're going to finish.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Q: A minute ago you were talking about the crowds of unemployed people in Tabriz. To what extent did you at the time or around in that period of time see the revolution as having partially economic origins?

Metrinko: A very strong effect. How do I explain it? Let me give you some examples first. The sorts of people who were talking to me and the reasons why they had become disaffected, the economic reasons why they had become disaffected from the Pahlavis.

From one old friend, whose father had been a village

landlord-- he had owned a village up until the period of the White Revolution, which took away the land of the middle-class landlords and distributed it among the peasantry. Well, this man had grown up fairly well off and then his father had lost the family village. It was simply taken. They were given a little bit of money in exchange for it, but the money disappeared immediately, and the Shah's White Revolution meant that this family had lost everything.

He took me once, when I was in the Peace Corps, to see the site of his former house. It was in the middle of a rather bustling village. It was a grand old house in total ruin. It looked like something from the Civil War. It was just a big Iranian sort of squire's house and walls fallen in, et cetera. You could see homes like this-- ruined, large mansions-- all over the country of Iran.

Now he had been bitter about the Shah ever since then. As soon as other people began expressing their bitterness in public, he jumped on the bandwagon, even though he was a fairly highly ranking bureaucrat himself at this point.

That's an example of, you know, some of the economic reasons, but the economic reasons went far back into the past for him.

Q: Old grievances?

Metrinko: Old grievances and economic grievances. Another

friend who was a member of the Shah's escort, a policeman who was a member of his land-- I mean, what they called the ground escort. When the Shah would travel by land, by car, this was one of his escort. He had grown up in a small town, and used to talk to me about the disparity in his income and the incomes of those people he could see around the Shah. And as he said-- this was in 1977 he told me this, in April of 1977 roughly, a year before trouble really started happening-- he said, "Why should I as a policeman, a police officer, why should I protect people who have Mercedes-Benzes and villas in Shemeran in North Tehran?"

Now he himself was a bit of a maverick. He used to love stopping Mercedes-Benzes and giving the people traffic violations. He would never stop a Pekan, one of the cheaper Iranian cars, but he loved hassling the rich. You know, he was not alone. There were a fair number of people like him. Very sharp, intelligent, the young Turk type. The young Turk-- you know, referring to that period in Turkish history-- who were very upset at what they could see as their prospects, contrasted to what they could see the sleazy rich had gotten. Certainly an economic reason there. He, by the way, was living as a police officer, living with a roommate in a sort of walk-up, cold water semi-slum. On his salary he could never have afforded a car, a refrigerator, a television. His parents gave him a couple of things like that for his house, but he couldn't have purchased them himself. If he had tried to live on his salary, it would not have been possible in the city of Tehran. And he was an



officer. You had people like that.

And, you know, I could go on like that, but I think you're getting the idea. An awful lot of new glittery money hit Iran with the oil. And it was advertised all the time on television, it was advertised in the newspapers. It never really got down to the lower classes and a lot of them were beginning to resent it very much.

Q: Now one of the turning points in this whole period was when a Tehran newspaper in January of '78 published an article criticizing Ayatollah Khomeini. This was in January 7th, 1978, when this piece was published in a Tehran newspaper.

Metrinko: Caused a big outburst in Qom and later the outburst in Tabriz. The outburst in Tabriz was really the beginning, because it saw massive destruction of buildings and took two days. It was also heavily covered by the press for the first time.

Q: Before we get into that, were there any demonstrations in January in Tabriz?

Metrinko: Not that I know of. No. There may have been something small, but it was not in the press. I never heard of any.

Q: Now did you witness any of these events that you were

describing in Tabriz? What did you witness yourself when you were in Tabriz? What did you see? February 18th, I think? February 18th or 19th?

Metrinko: I was there certainly then, when the city of Tabriz lost seventy or eighty buildings, including the Rastakhiz Party headquarters, which no one mourned. Lost most of our banks, or a great number of banks. Other government buildings were badly attacked. And for several days you could see the debris in the streets.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Q: You were saying? What social groups were involved in these demonstrations from your--

Metrinko: What social groups? Well, let me give you an example. I had a security guard of local police. Three policemen, three sergeants were assigned as my security force-- I mean my personal body-- you know, security for my person. And they would show up every day. They were sent over by the local Kalanteri, the precinct headquarters. They would come over, they would go over my schedule for the day, and they would escort me whenever I went outside the consulate premises. Now normally I would simply tell them I wasn't going to do anything, they would leave, and then I would leave without them, because I didn't want them to be

following me around.

Anyway, when all the trouble started they immediately were sent over by the precinct, to sort of follow me around and make sure that nothing happened to me. After the rioting had been going on for a couple of hours and we started to realize how serious it was, I wanted to get rid of them. I basically didn't want them there, because they were going to attract attention. So I told them to please go back to their own homes, that I was going to go into the consulate and I was going to stay there and I didn't really need them. I was thinking about them as well. I knew they were worried about their families and nobody knew what was happening in the city. And my part of the city was so close to the army base, I figured nothing would happen there. Well, they left. Two or three days later two of them showed up and I asked where the third was, and one of them said, "Well, he is in a little bit of trouble. He can't come back." "Well, where is he?" "Well, he's in prison." "What do you mean, he's in prison?" "Well, sir, when you told us to go, you know, back to our own homes two days ago, he was passing by and saw the crowd attacking the Rastakhiz Party headquarters. So he joined in." I said, "He was a policeman." "Yes." [Laughter] They said that it wasn't so bad that he joined in, but he also took part in the looting of the building and they found a piece of furniture in his house.

As it turned out, I spoke to the lieutenant-governor. Got him out of jail, but they would not let him come back to be my

guard. That was the deal we worked out, that they would set him free because of my character reference for him, but they wouldn't let him back to the consulate.

When you ask what kind of people, there's a good example. Why did he do it? Well, a police sergeant in Tabriz made a starvation salary.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Q: Were middle-class professionals involved in the demonstrations at this stage?

Metrinko: At this stage, I doubt it.

Q: More the bazaari and--

Metrinko: It was more the younger males. And a lot of the religious groups. Not necessarily led by the clergy, but the prayer groups, the people who would-- you know, who were banded together in small religious meeting discussion groups. And also, of course, the people who would join any crowd because it was a crowd.

As far as I remember, that particular day or two in Tabriz, there were about seventy or eighty people killed. I had the figure later from the deputy governor of the city and I'm trying to remember now what he had told me, but it's a figure that goes

back ten years in the past, so I really don't. But it was seventy, eighty, something of that nature. Which is quite a number.

Q: It's said that the local army garrison refused to fire on the protesters. In another version, it was the police that refused to fire. Did you hear anything about--

Metrinko: In Tabriz?

Q: Yes. That's what I've read in various versions of the incidents, that the police or the local army garrison refused-- or parts of them refused to fire on the protesters, because they had relatives or friends, whatever. Or were sympathetic.

Metrinko: They may have refused, but then how did protesters keep getting killed?

Q: Well, maybe they had to bring in other people from outside the area perhaps to do the job.

Metrinko: On this particular day, again according to the Farmandar of the city, which is the governor of the city, as opposed to the state governor or whatever, there were seventy, eighty people killed.

Q: I've read that.

Metrinko: And that was done by local soldiers and/or local police. Not my police, of course. They were busily looting. [Laughs] But other police and the soldiers, the gendarmerie, whoever. As time went on, people continued to be killed on both sides. It was not only police or only military killing demonstrators. It happened on both sides. And there were a fair number of assassinations of government officials, police officials, in this period. So it was working both ways.

Q: How did you analyze the situation at this stage? What was your take on the significance of these demonstrations?

Metrinko: I wrote a long airgram, a memorandum describing what had happened, the extent of the damage. The casualties, the estimates. A basic description of who had done what. And concluded by saying that there were social and political and economic reasons why this was going to continue, and that there was a religious dimension to it as well, that the demonstrators and the protesters were calling out the name of Khomeini, and described who Khomeini was.

Now I've read the telegram or that airgram again in the last year. It was very accurate. I sent the telegram, or the airgram rather-- eight, nine pages, whatever the number of it was-- up to Tehran, and the embassy did send it out intact. They added

something to the end. After my signature, they added a line something to the effect that the embassy political section does not agree with the above analysis and for the embassy's analysis of what happened, please see such-and-such a telegram. But they sent it out.

Q: Did you get any kind of direct response from the embassy?

Metrinko: Certainly I was on the phone the whole time it was happening. There was a little bit of interest. Not as much as there should have been. I think though that everybody was pretty shocked by it, but then assumed that it was something that was just an exception and would not happen again.

Q: Episodic?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: Now forty days after the killings at Tabriz and the demonstrations that you described, there was another period of nation-wide mourning at the end of March, and there were more protests and more killings in various cities around Iran. In another cycle forty days later there were more demonstrations, I guess in early May. How did the situation in Tabriz change?

Metrinko: The security situation in general?

Q: Yes. Political security, the extent of the demonstrations. Were there more demonstrations forty days later in Tabriz?

Metrinko: There were demonstrations in Tabriz off and on from then until 1979. And there are still demonstrations going on in Tabriz in 1988. But certainly it opened up the whole political demonstration cycle. There were a lot of things being written on walls, anti-American, anti-American government, anti-Pahlavi government. One of the most interesting effects of all of this was that it suddenly opened up conversation. So that in the past if I had gone to an upper middle-class dinner party, conversation was going to be limited to things like vacations, arts, you know, whatever, travel, and nobody would ever mention the name of the Shah. But conversations among academic friends from the university, the professional crowd that I used to see quite a bit of, even little old housekeepers suddenly became very political. Everyone was talking about politics and everyone was discussing the Shah, the Pahlavi family. It had just opened up Pandora's box. And they didn't care. They were discussing it openly. This was a total reversal. Before, things like that would always be discussed in small, private, secluded places. If you discussed the Shah or his family, it was almost as though you were doing something obscene. You felt guilty doing it with Iranians. But suddenly everybody was talking about the future of Iran, what's happening, the relationship with other countries, religion. And the demonstrations did that. They took the lid



off.

I think it was then that Iranians started talking to each other, and that was the beginning of the end for the Pahlavis, who had survived that long by making sure Iranians did not talk to each other.

Q: And you reported these kinds of conversations on to the embassy?

Metrinko: Oh, yes. Of course. Not every conversation, because I was just out every night. I mean, every day, every night I was out dealing with Iranians or, you know, living Persian. But the significant ones, yes. General sort of wrap-ups. Yes, definitely.

Q: The general tenor of--

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: I've read-- in the Washington Post they had a long series of articles some years ago about the revolution and the State Department's response, and one suggested that some of your reports had been held up by the embassy or diluted in some way by political officers in Tehran. Is there anything to that?

Metrinko: I'm not really sure. Okay, now, one thing about that.

Normally, there are very few ambassadors who will allow consulates or consulates general to report directly to Washington. In almost all cases the reporting comes through the embassy and it is screened there. This was certainly true in other countries I've been assigned to. It had nothing to do with the personalities of the people assigned to the consulates. It's just that ambassadors, once they become ambassadors, become territorial. Their territory is the entire country. They don't want the consulates or political officers in the consulates setting themselves up as minor embassies.

All of the reporting-- I don't know if anything was ever held back. I think that most of it did eventually reach Washington. But the reporting from one consulate or from one person would not normally be given a huge amount of attention anyway. There's simply too much paper. There was too much paper then and there were a hundred alternate sources for information about what was occurring in Iran. No one in Washington, in the government in the policy side, can say that they did not know what was happening there. It's invalid. There were newspapers and magazines and academic articles and a thousand conferences going on, and visitors-- et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Anybody who wanted to read a hundred pages or a thousand pages a day about Iran in 1977 could have. All they had to do was sit down, go to a library and do it. Certainly the country was covered extensively in the media. It always had been. And there was a huge selection of material available and constantly being

renewed. There were also huge numbers of Iranians here, who were quite happy to talk and to express their dissatisfaction with what was happening in the country.

So, you know, whether or not a couple of reports, a couple of telegrams, were delayed, held up, it's not really important. These are just drops in what should have been, what was an ocean of information.

[TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

Q: Now in early April, I guess around the 9th, there was a big pro-government rally at Tabriz, which Prime Minister Amuzegar addressed. Did you witness this rally?

Metrinko: No, I did not. Rallies of that sort, you could always watch them on television or hear about them immediately. But in general I've attended certainly enough ceremonies, and especially when I was a teacher in Iran in the Peace Corps, I was required to attend demonstrations and things of this sort fairly frequently. You know, the Shah's birthday celebrations and celebrations in honor of various days.

For rallies of that nature, or any political rally in Iran, there was a very standard way of getting crowds of people. Factory owners, shop owners, people who controlled masses of people, school supervisors would be told that their staffs were to come to the rally, bearing the appropriate placards or banners

or signs or whatever.

I asked one good friend, who was a businessman in Iran-- who employed, oh, twenty, thirty people in his business. We were talking about how you get people to the rallies, and he said, "It's very simple." He said, "They don't come and order me to send twenty of my staff to the rally." He said, "What they do is they inform me about the rally and they tell me that they hope they'll see me there and that I'll bring people from the office or from the factory." He said, "If I don't do it, they don't say anything to me necessarily the next day or the next week, but when it comes time for my taxes to be done, I'm reminded of my participation or lack of it at the rally, and a different evaluation is placed on my property. Or when I need a license of any sort," he said, "there is a sort of follow-up to it, and you learn very quickly that if you don't want to be hassled and you do want to get your licenses and your permits, you simply send people to these rallies carrying placards and signs."

Certainly from the surrounding villages, the surrounding small towns, you could see people being bussed in, with all the placards and the signs they were going to be holding. You know, I'd see the same thing in Poland when I'd go to rallies. That's the standard way of attracting a crowd. Who would attend a political rally otherwise, for God's sakes? People are busy. [Laughs] If they have a holiday, they want to enjoy it.

Q: Now around May or June Ambassador Sullivan authorized