

Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

PETER AVERY

INTERVIEWEE: PETER AVERY

INTERVIEWER: SHUSHA ASSAR

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND: FEBRUARY 9 and 10, 1985

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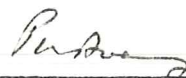
PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by Shusha Assar with Professor Peter Avery in Cambridge, England in February 9 and 10, 1985.

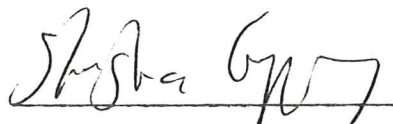
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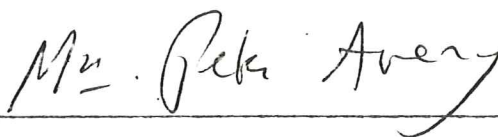
Interviewee



Interviewer



Date of Agreement



Subject of Tapes

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor Peter Avery studies Persian with Ann Lambton at School of Oriental and African Studies of London University. He worked for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Khuzestan and later on for a number of British contacting firms in Tehran. He eventually moved to England and settled at Cambridge University, where he has taught Persian language and history for over thirty years. His experiences with Iran involve his meetings with leading Iranian writers such as Hedayat, Alavi and Chubak, as well as statesmen such as Alam, Hoveyda and Teymur Bakhtiyar. Mr. Avery's reminiscences encompass political and social developments which has shaped the Iranian history of latter part of this century.

Interviewee: Peter Avery Interview #1

Interviewer: Shusha Assar Place: Cambridge

Date: February 9-10, 1985

Q: Tape number one with Peter Avery in Cambridge.

Now, we could start from the very beginning -- how you got interested in Persian Studies and got involved with Persia.

Avery: I originally became interested in Persian Studies in Northern India, really. It was in Lahore as the guest of Khan Bahador Mohammad Shahri who was a great Orientalist.

Q: And when was that?

Avery: He showed me Persian manuscripts. That was in 1943 during the war when I was an officer in the Navy, serving in India.

I loved Urdu and realized, of course, these strong Persian components in that language and was led on from that to an interest in Persian poetry which Indian Muslim to talk to me about, particularly the poetry of Hafez of Shiraz. And I was determined in the first instance to learn Persian entirely for the purpose of reading this poet, Hafez -- translations of his work I was shown. So Hafez took me into Persia, really. And I think that at the end it will still be Hafez that I'm reading just as I start to shuffle off this mortal coil. But I still find Hafez absolutely entrancing as a poet -- one of the most fascinating of varied poets and demonstrators of the Iranian genius imaginable.

I came back there after the war, before going into the services in 1942. I'd been reading English and the idea was that I should major in English Literature. I'd also done French and

Medieval History. But I was particularly interested in English Literature. On returning from the war -- being demobilized from the Navy -- I told everybody that I wanted to do Persian and Arabic. And it was for that reason that I went to the London School of Oriental and African Studies where I read Persian under Professor Lambton. I was hardly aware that Persian was taught anywhere else. I went rather precipitously to the School of Oriental Studies because I didn't realize that Persian could be learned at Oxford and Cambridge. Had I thought more carefully about it, I think I would have preferred to read Persian at Cambridge where I now myself teach it. But I didn't, in fact, go to Iran until August, 1949. That was the month that I arrived in Iran for the first time. Having completed my degree at the Oriental School in Arabic and Persian, I was offered a job as Supervisor of Language Training in the oil fields of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company. That job entailed teaching Persian or being responsible for organizing the teaching of the Persian Language to an expatriate staff and also being responsible for organizing English classes for the Iranian labor. This was quite a large program. I was also responsible for educational liaisons between the company and the local Iranian Government Education Authorities for the schools which were operated in the various oil drilling, oil producing areas in the oil fields of Southern Iran. And I arrived at Abadan, the bigger refinery town, which received the oil from these fields for refining and exports one afternoon in August, 1949. I can't remember the precise date. But what I do remember is stepping out of the airplane into an oven-like atmosphere -- great heat. I've always been fond of dry heat so I was quite exhilarated by this great heat.

Q: Excuse me, who sent you? I mean, did you join the

Avery: I was employed by the Anglo Iranian Oil Company. They're my paymasters -- the Anglo Iranian Oil Company. I was actually in their training department as Supervisor of Language Training in the fields and Liaison Officer between the oil company and the government over the school that was set up and maintained in the oil areas. This was a very exciting life because it did at least get me to Iran -- the country, as it were, of my dreams. And I found it very enjoyable being in the oil fields. I was extremely glad not to be in Abadan which was a kind of (to my way of looking at it) industrial encampment, whereas the oil fields were much more romantic topographically much more interesting in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains in Bakhtiyari

country. I occasionally used to go down to Khorramshahr and to Ahvaz at the week ends. But the weekends I really remember most happily were the weekends I spent in the ancient city of Shushtar where we used to go and stay with some Iranians who became friends of mine and where, among other things, I used to shoot in the lush jungly fields around this ancient city of Shushtar which in itself for anybody interested in Islam and the history of Iran and of Islam -- was a fascinatingly historical city with exciting water mills cutting the rocks where the River Karun debouched from the Zagros Mountains onto the coastal plain and of course, provided a force of water which was extremely useful for harnessing for the purpose of operating mills. But I began to get rather frustrated after about six months because I could see no chance of being committed to go elsewhere in Iran. And [I was] extremely anxious to visit cities like Esfahan and of course, Tehran -- the capitol.

My chance, however, came. Happily, I was asked to act as the guide and the interpreter for one of the oil company's training managers who came out from the United Kingdom and take him to Esfahan and to Tehran, which I was able to do.

In Tehran, I was able to meet Sadeq Hedayat, Sadeq Chubak, Bozorg 'Alavi and a number of other of the contemporary literati of Iran whose works I greatly admired and who indeed -- the three names in particular which I have just mentioned -- comprised the major contributors to modern Iranian literature of this century.

I spent a great deal of time with these men in the week or so that I was in Tehran.

The training manager from London I was to accompany was extremely indulgent in allowing me time off to associate with these literary men. And it was there that I will say I became acquainted with Mr. Iran-Parast in his bookshop, Ketabkhaneh Danesh in Khiyaban Sa'adi. It was, in fact, in that bookshop that I first set eyes on Sadeq Hedayat.

It was a very peculiar occurrence, really. That morning I'd asked friends of mine in the oil company -- one of whom was Sadeq Chubak who was working in the oil company, the other was Hasan Razavi -- whether they could arrange for me to meet Sadeq Hedayat. They said yes. They would arrange it then for the evening for they saw him every evening.

I then left them quite early in the morning and went across to Khiaban Saadi to Iran-Parast's Ketabkhaneh Danesh and asked him for editions of Hedayat's writings. He whispered to me. He said, "Well, would you like to meet the man himself?"

I said, "Oh yes, I am meeting him," rather presumptuously. I said, "Oh yes, that's all taken care of. I'm meeting him tonight."

But he said, "You could meet him now if you'd like."

And I glanced toward the back of the shop and there was a man in a trilnear hat pulled over one eye -- large spectacles -- looking at the books on the shelves.

And I said, "Is that him?"

He said, "Yes, that is Sadeq Hedayat."

And Sadeq Hedayat and I began a conversation then which went on --

Q: In Persian?

Avery: No. My Persian wasn't good enough. I talked with him partly in Persian, partly in French. He didn't know English. It was mainly in Persian but we helped each other out with French words and expressions from time to time because of course, his foreign language (as was generally the case with cosmopolitan educated Iranians of his generation), was French.

I remember we kept on going -- he walking backwards or I walking backwards, as the case might be -- round and round the book stacks in this long, narrow shop talking and talking about everything imaginable -- Virginia Wolfe the modern novel, Proust. And I suddenly stopped and said, "But I'm amazed that you and I should be able to talk like this on first meeting. Within a matter of seconds we should begin this conversation and go on as we are doing. It's just astonishing to me because we come from such radically different backgrounds."

And he said, "Don't you know the Persian phrase: " Del bedel rah darad"?"

And I said, "No." I didn't.

And I was always, in those days, the student of the language jotting down these phrases, proverbs, adages, sayings which are such an extraordinarily rich element in the Persian language -- the whole salt and savour of the Persian language. Out came my little notebook as I wrote down "Del bedel rah darad" -- The heart finds a way to the heart.

He said, "That's what it's all about. That's why we can talk to each other as we are doing."

So we carried on. And that was the beginning of a friendship with Sadeq Hedayat which of course, lasted not as long as it might have. It lasted until his suicide. This was in 1949.

Q: He went to Paris.

Avery: And his suicide in Paris was in 1951. He wrote to me before he left and said that I would never see him again.

Q: Really? Why?

Avery: And certainly not in the streets of Tehran.

I wrote back and said that I certainly hoped that I would see him again and in the streets of Tehran. His presence was necessary in his own country. He was the upholder of a torch and the

flame that the Iranian people needed. It was the flame that Hafez and Sa'adi had kept alight. It was a flame that men like he should be going on keeping alight in the modern world.

But he explained again that he was leaving the waste and the filth and the dirt and the degradation of Iran (as he saw it at that time) for Paris and that he would never return inspite of my pleadings that he shouldn't think in such terms. He didn't, in fact, say to me that I would never see him at all again. His emphasis was on the fact that he would never again be in Iran.

And of course, some months later I heard from an Iranian friend in Masjed Soleyman, the oil field center where I was living, who had heard it on the Delhi Radio that news had been broadcast of Sadeq of Sadeq Hedayat's suicide in Paris in 1951.

I very much regret not having been able to keep the letter. It got lost in the subsequent travels I made. This extraordinary letter he wrote to me about his determination to leave Iran and to leave what he described as "in cherkiha va pastiha-ye inja"-- this dirtiness and this degradation that is here." This was the vein in which he wrote an extremely bitter he wrote an extremely bitter letter written (I may say) just after the assassination of Razmara who was a military officer who'd been Prime Minister of the country for a short while and who was suddenly assassinated. I think this assassination signaled to a man of Sadeq Hedayat's acute sensitivity and awareness of Iranian history and life and conditions, a sense that the rest was going to be decline and despair somehow.

Razmara was his kinsman by marriage. In spite of what others might argue, I'm quite certain that Sadeq Hedayat was, in fact, in sympathy with some of General Razmara's ideas and ideals.

Q: Did it emerge why Razmara was assassinated and who did it? Did it ever come to light?

Avery: No, it didn't. Of course, there were many rumors, that I was the receipient of along with other people who were in touch or part of the intellectual and literati scene that there were about the people who actually manipulated the Fada'iyan-e Eslam who actually shot him. Q: Why would they do that? Twelve years later, when they assassinated Hasan 'Ali Mansur, they said it

was because the price of petrol had doubled suddenly. But I mean, was there any measure that General Razmara had fought hard?

Avery: Oh yes, particularly -- Yes, he was of course, considered too likely to compromise with the British over the oil negotiations. You see, this was at the time when I think all the supplemental oil agreement was being negotiated, when an attempt was being made to revise the price structure and royalty payments on the southern oil, which was in those days being exploited by the Anglo Iranian Oil Company.

Razmara was trying to achieve some kind of rational arrangement with the oil company -- a revision of terms with the Iranian Government. And of course, many people suspected what they would describe as a sell-out or suspected him of being too eager to compromise with the British.

The result -- Of course, what finally did happen was that in 1951 the oil was actually nationalized by the National Front deputies who maintained a working majority in the Majles under the leadership of Mohammad Mossadeq who became Prime Minister. And a very strong nationalist period ensued.

Looking back on those days in Tehran in 1950, meeting Hedayat and Chubak and Bozorg 'Alavi and others, what does of course, stand out in my impressions is the enormous freedom that we all enjoyed at that time. And I think of Chubak and Hedayat and Bozorg 'Alavi and Qahremaniyan (I think his name was) and various other literati walking about with me in Khiyaban Shah, Khiyaban Eslambol at six o'clock in the evening going to cafes and bars in that area, talking, arguing with complete and utter freedom. There was a complete lack of restraint in our conversations and in our activities.

These were the last days, did we but know it. Of course, we weren't aware of the fact that at the time these were the last days of their freedom that had been known in Iran since the abdication of Reza Shah and during the war. The freedom of newspapers, of political expression and so on go only high degree for a country like Iran.

Q: I would love to actually dwell on that for a little while because of its implications for what comes later.

When you went to Tehran finally to interpret for this high ranking official you had already read some of the writings of these people.

Avery: Oh yes, of course.

Q: You got in touch with them. Just straightforwardly, got in touch with them.

Avery: Yes, that's right. That's all, yes.

Q: And there was, as you say, tremendous literary and journalistic activity at the time.

Avery: Tremendous.

Q: It was the beginning of a kind of free democratic society.

Avery: That's right.

Q: Which [if] a lot of people today, say, had continued that

trend it would have been a very healthy development in regard to what the poor Shah desired for Iran to become like a sort of Western democracy would have been achieved.

Avery: Yes, certainly.

Q: Whereas the clampdown that came later as a result of all the chaos halted that process and frustrated the intellectuals and to a larger degree contributed to the developments afterwards.

Avery: Yes.

Q: What do you think about the whole of that era?

Avery: Well, at that time the actual freedom was remarkable. Of course, there was a great deal of anxiety on part of people like Sadeq Hedayet about the state of society. He insisted on taking me himself to some of Tehran to see people who were living like troglodytes in old hobbles and old brick works and so on, living underground and so on, in conditions of appalling poverty. He said it was very important. [chuckles] I remember his putting it like this. He said, "You as an Orientalist and a student of Iran and of Iranian literature, this too, "inham jozv'-e ta'lim va tarbiyat shoma ast": And this too must be part of your education to see the squalor and filth in which so ded to me as something specially Iranian. This was poverty of which there was a great deal over the world. We could discuss it and the iniquity of it quite openly without suddenly being arrested for criticizing any particular government or other. So that there was a considerable amount of political freedom. We also could go into cafes and have conversations and so on without any glance over our shoulders to see whether the other table behind us was full of informants or not.

Q: Which were the cafes that were frequented by the intellegetsia?

Avery: Well, I can't remember their names. It was mostly on Avenue Shah and Eslambol, particularly Shah, around about the crossroads where Lalehzar was crossed by Naderi and Eslambol and down to Meydan Mokhber Saltaneh on the one side and Khiyaban Ferdowsi on the other. That's where we used to walk. And Lalehzar, too, was one of the areas. But it was mostly in that area of Nader Shah where the cafes [were]. And The Bistro was one place I remember we went to. It was called The Bistro. But of course, Tehran changed completely. All that kind of character -- sort of characteristic of finding a kind of coziness, a kind of urban coziness, inside the favorite haunts and the favorite restaurants, "jahay-e denj be estelah"-- "cozy little spots" where men of like mind and one heart could meet at given hours -- certainly six o'clock in the evening was a favorite -- and swap the news, drink vodka or beer or both and joke with each other, have sandwiches and so on. [It was] really a very sophisticated way of life which was both Iranian and Parisian. It was both Persian and French.

Q: What [about] Seyyed Sadeq Goharin?

Avery: Seyyed Sadeq was not a member of that particular --

: What's his name Seyyed Sadeq?

Avery: Seyyed Sadeq Goharin.

Q: Goharin. He wasn't --

Avery: He was a friend but he was one of those whom we went to see in their houses. Some of us -- those who went off to the streets at night in the early part of the evening and visited the bars and restaurants -- Sadeq Hedayat always, Chubak invariably, Bozorg 'Alavi often. Then the question would arise as to whose house we went to for dinner. Hedayat himself would pose the question, "Now, tonight, to whose house are we going for dinner?" Or he'd say, "What have you got for dinner, what does so and so have for dinner?" And of course, it was a taciturn arrangement. There wasn't a roster arrangement. It was always really planned. The dinner

would be at such and such a person's house because the dinners, when you arrived there, were always obviously very carefully [chuckles] prepared -- dinners that had been cooking for many hours. They'd been long in their preparation because they were generally delicious meals.

Now, people like Seyyed Sadeq Goharin and others were the sort one visited in their houses. They didn't meet so much in the streets. One would go to the house of so and so or perhaps after a meal, one would go on to a meeting because of course, Iranian society was always (and I hope and presume still is) a collection of "dowreh" -- of circles, you see. And this was really a circle that I was in with these men.

What was the name of the politician who started the Toiler's Party about that time? You see, there were new political parties being made and I remember I became quite friendly with the leader of the Toiler's Party, the "Hezb-e Kargaran." What was the name of that politician who came from Kerman originally. He was one of the interesting people I had met.

Q: To go back to what we call, for the time being, the Parisian Circle like Hedayat and Chubak --

Avery: Chubak.

Q: Chubak and Bozorg 'Alavi.

Now, wasn't Bozorg 'Alavi one of the old Tudeh Party -- fifty-three people?

Avery: That's right.

Q: And he'd been in jail and then got out.

Avery: He'd been in jail, yes.

Q: And generally, the whole -- It seems to me that at the time all of these people were sympathetic or what we would call fellow travelers with the Tudeh Party then.

Avery: I hardly think so. I never believed that Sadeq Hedayat, for example, was sympathetic to the Tudeh because I don't think Sadeq Hedayat was ever a communist.

Q: None of them were communists. Well, I mean, Bozorg Alavi was at some point.

Avery: Of course, one must remember that the Tudeh certainly had both an appeal to and a backing from good minds and intellects because the evidence of the Mardom, Tudeh Party newspaper points in that direction. And some of the best Persian language, probably the best Persian writing of modern times is in that paper. And of course, the highest quality of journalism in modern Iran is manifested by that newspaper. There's some very good minds operating in the Tudeh.

Q: On the whole, the intelligentsia in that period (it seems to me) were divided between those who were sympathetic to the Tudeh Party and those who were sympathetic to the Nationalists -- Mossadeq and so forth.

Avery: Well, I don't think there was any clear division. What I think was certainly happening at this time (and I'm talking about the winter 1949 into 1950) was an extremely liberal atmosphere

that was prevailing. Most of the people were what in Europeans terms would be described as liberals. They were people who enjoyed freedom, wanted freedom, wanted betterment, wanted improvement of society. They were more, as it were, liberals than any kind of "ist".

Q: That's right.

Avery: But of course, the National Front formed -- coagulated (I always said) which was fair enough, coalesced -- very rapidly under the pressure of the chance that was being seized thoroughly to revise the oil agreement -- the Anglo Iranian Oil Consortium. Well, it suddenly became apparent in 1951 that this consortium had to be rescinded and the whole production and marketing of Iran's oil had to be placed on a new footing.

Now, under pressure of this, the National Front came into being quite suddenly. The National Front was hardly a factor in 1949. It was just about on the eve of the development of the National Front. Mossadeq, in 1949, was not even being talked about. It all happened quite quickly.

[end of side one of tape one]

Q: So you were saying that it all happened quite quickly.

Avery: Quite quickly. And one of the things that people seem to be slow to learn is that, in fact, in Iranian politics developments do occur extremely rapidly. There was always a tendency to try to discover their origins by reading back in history. But the actual developments -- the formation of a new party, the sudden coming into prominence of a leader -- can occur with startling suddenness in Iranian affairs.

So that when I was in Tehran that first time, there wasn't any evidence that within about a year's time we should be faced with the oil nationalization crisis.

I returned to oil fields after many exciting weeks in Esfahan. I revisited Esfahan but not again Tehran.

I revisited Esfahan during the oil crisis when rich Esfahanians -- many of them had descended from princes of the Qajar family, the former dynasty ruling over Iran -- would half in jest, half seriously say to me, "Could [we] become British citizens, please?" Could I arrange it for them? "Yek gozarnameh-e Engelis be ma bedin" "because they were so afraid of communism coming. They were all convinced -- all these rich Esfahanians in 1951 that the country was going to go communist and become yet another satellite country to the Soviet Union. And did I think I could arrange --

Q: And of course, the Tudeh Party --

Avery: The Tudeh Party was obviously something they feared very much. Some of their sons, of course, were members of it, too. [chuckles]

Q: It was extremely powerful all the more so because it had become fashionable and it was sort of --

Avery: It had become fashionable and of course, in Esfahan which is the one, apart from the oil community of the south, major industrial city in Iran, the Tudeh was very much in evidence.

I was constantly being told that it was all a laugh, it was all going to be communist.

Q: So what was the -- Before Mossadeq came and there was question of renegotiating the agreement over oil with the British.

What did the government at the time before Mossadeq came want out of the British? And what was the argument about?

I mean obviously, the British realized that they couldn't have it scot-free as they had before. They had to make some concession. But what did they want?

Avery: Well, they wanted much more, much fairer concession of terms and of course, the pressures were heightened after a fifty- fifty oil agreement was concluded between the Arabs and the United States. They set an example that the Iranians couldn't see any reason not to follow in their arrangement with the British, a more equitable even if half and half arrangement.

Of course, the British had to point out to them that there were complications in the fifty-fifty agreement that was being used as an example. Of course, this meant that the host government had to pay for a great deal of the oil exploration which is one of the more expensive items in the very expensive business of exploiting oil. Matters like that were being discussed. Of course, if you want fifty-fifty you have to pay very much more at the moment. As the oil company quite truthfully pointed out, all the expenses of the operation and the huge expenses of exploring sometimes -- exploring areas that proved unproductive -- were of course, born by the company.

If they changed the royalty of paying arrangements, then of course, charges and the cost of the undertaking would have to be shared in a different way, too.

All these negotiations dragged on. It's my personal opinion that the company was extremely slow to realize that times had changed and a much more generous approach towards the Iranians with, perhaps, a correspondingly less generous, less solicitous attitude towards the check sharers in the company would have to be made.

The opportunity was missed and of course --

Q: Were you in a position to point this out to them?

Avery: I was in no position to point this out at all. I was a schoolmaster, a teacher, a supervisor of language training. I had absolutely no influence whatsoever.

Q: I mean, you must have been at the time -- Obviously, listening to you, you had got very much attached to Persia and the Persians and the language and everything. You must have been suffering somewhat from --

Avery: Horrible frustration at seeing what was going on.

Q: Yes, but not only that, but what I call divided loyalties.

Avery: Oh, very much so. Yes, very much so. [I was] very frustrated at seeing what I thought was a rather stupidly intransigent attitude of the .

Q: And greedy. [chuckles]

Avery: And very divided loyalty.

I had good friends in the oil company who used to discuss these matters with me and point out

to me where my loyalties as a contractor -- as a person under contract with the oil company -- ought to lie.

However, eventually, the nationalization was put into effect and Mossadeq arranged for all the working British staff of the oil company to be formally invited to remain under the new conditions of the nationalized oil companies. He hoped that the company would continue [chuckles], of course, to operate profitably and successfully as it had been doing before. There's not much point in nationalizing a company if it goes dead on you. [chuckles]

So he very logically and understandably issued a formal invitation which was a little piece of paper which came around to each one of us, asking us to stay, and with the extraordinary legalistic approach that was being adopted by the British who were being very careful to stick to contracts and the letter of the law, presumably having in mind future legal action against the Iranians as unilateral breakers of the oil agreement. Members of the personnel staff actually came around to each one of us with a list of the staff to tick off as we were asked whether we would like to stay and work for the Iranians or whether we preferred to serve out our contracts with the Anglo Iranian [Oil Company]. Each were asked. When they got to me, of course, I said, "Well, I'm not sure. I'm the schoolmaster here. It doesn't really make very much difference to me who's sitting in the General Manager's chair -- in a foreign chair -- whether he's a Chinaman or an Iranian or an American or a British or whatever. I'm just supposed to arrange to help to teach people. It's rather like being a doctor."

They said, "Oh, yes. But you do realize that you are under contract, don't you?" And they ticked me off.

So my demurring was put aside for my own benefit, of course.

It was (I heard later) broadcast on the BBC News that all the expatriate staff of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company in Iran -- with one exception -- had expressed no willingness whatsoever to consider the Iranian's invitation to work in a nationalized oil company. [chuckles] I was rather glad, for the sake of my parents, that the one exception was not named as my father and mother

might have been worried. But as I later learned that they immediately guessed who the one exception was most likely to be. [chuckles] It didn't make any difference.

We were eventually evacuated from the oil fields.

Q: Looking back on the events of that time, don't you find it unbelievably shortsighted and self-destructive the way Britain behaved towards Iran which they never, of course, repeated in any other country? I mean, you know, the embargo and the blockades and all that --

Avery: No, I don't. The shortsighted and self-destructive -- I think [there] was a lot of shortsightedness before the nationalization.

I mean, my favorite story which is being one you'll probably see on television this month sometime because I tell it in a program that I was being interviewed for some time ago.

The shortsightedness occurred in the lead-up to the crisis.

I was responsible for providing night classes for the labor in the oil company. I had to do this in schools in Ahvaz, for example, that were partly sponsored by the company and partly sponsored by the Iranian Education Authority.

In one such school the electricity was very bad. The lighting was very bad. Because the lighting in Ahvaz City was very, very weak. So I had to light my classes with tilly lamps which was a very difficult thing to have to do. So I asked the Iranian government whether they couldn't improve their electricity. And they said, "No. What we want is electricity from you. You've got that big oil company plant and installation here with its own electricity which is very powerful indeed. Why don't you run wires to the school?"

And I, therefore, went to the company and said, "Can I please run electricity to the school where my classes take place which I'm now having to light with oil lamps?"

And the company said, "No, certainly not. Because if we start lighting one of their schools they will expect us to light all their schools."

You see, it was the syndrome of us and them.

Q: [unclear]

Avery: Well, I said, "Since most of the people who go to the schools are the children of workers in the oil company. And since, in this instance, I use the school at night for oil company financed and sponsored classes for the labor, I just can't see the point. "Ah, No I know we can't create a precedent. We can't supply electricity in an area where it is the responsibility of the local Iranian authorities to supply electricity."

Well, now this sort of attitude was extremely shortsighted. It would have been very much better than running into a quarrel and having a nationalization and an oil dispute with the Iranians just to provide electricity from the whole of the province of Khuzestan which I think would have been cheaper in the end and generous. And everybody would have had a much cleaner reputation after it.

It was this kind of thing -- this kind of nit picking, miserliness and caution not to give an inch more than they had to -- that caused a great deal of the problem. Once the trouble had come and nationalization had taken place in Mossadeq's government and thereby unilaterally cancelled a two-party oil agreement into which, incidently, arrangements for cancellation were built (which were ignored) -- Once that happened, then one couldn't expect the oil company to do anything else than to claim that the oil refined was its oil and that the Iranians on their own had no right to sell it.

What, in effect, then occurred was a sort of strangling of Iran again.

Q: That's right. [unclear]

Avery: The use of power (such as I do not think will ever again be possible in our lifetimes, anyway) by a Western power to prevent the Iranians from marketing and producing a commodity out of their own soil.

Q: Now, this is very interesting. Because, you see, if it were today (in a sense) and Britain wrote to America and other Western countries and said, "I am in trouble. Could you come to my rescue by blockading trade with such and such a country?" the chances are that everybody would say no.

But in that instance everybody said yes. They all came out on the side of Britain. They strangled Iran and Mossadeq in those circumstances couldn't do a damn thing.

It seems to me that also within the country, the communist parties that had been helping which have since then become their policy of Moscow -- their directives from Moscow -- to help nationalist movements in order to later take over from them. At the time they just opposed it. There seemed to be that there was no proper directive from Moscow. Therefore, the Iranian Tudeh Party on a par with nationalists opposed Mossadeq until the last minute.

So that Mossadeq had to really fight on all fronts. There was no way in which he could succeed (it seems to me) to win the battle.

Avery: No. What to the communists, anyway, would be bourgeois

purely nationalist revolution or attempt on the part of Mossadeq, certainly received very little support from the radical left and it eventually petered out.

Of course, there were attempts for a long time at negotiation. But I don't think it was negotiation that Mossadeq was seriously intent on drawing to a satisfactory conclusion. I think he wanted to try to go it alone just to see what would happen and certainly in the hopes of far more world sympathy than he was able to get.

Q: Well I mean, Khomeini's going it alone -- meeting at left and right and center -- and getting away with it.

Avery: Yes, but conditions have changed entirely since 1951. The Middle East and then the oil situation are very different now.

Q: Do you think it was thanks to the Mossadeq experience that both sides have learned their lessons?

Avery: Well, I think one of the lessons that was learned in the Mossadeq experience was that the world could, in fact, do without Iranian oil. But of course, that meant an enormous hyping up of oil production in Iraq.

It always used to be said in Iraq that there ought to be a statue in gold in the main square of Baghdad of Mohammad Mossadeq because he was the man to whom Iraq owed western effort in rapidly developing their oil industry.

So various other counterpoising developments occurred so that it was possible to leave Mossadeq and to leave Iran's oil in the ground.

The situation today is a much more complex affair and entirely different.

Q: But there is another thing that also happened, which is this. It seems to me, and I may be completely wrong, that Mossadeq should have enlisted the help of the Shah at least and to have cooperated with the Shah. Because the Shah, or at least monarchy, had a very solid basis then in Iran. And the Shah, obviously, himself was very liberal, wanted to do the best for the country and everything.

Instead of opposing the Shah and acting as though the Shah was an adversary, Mossadeq could easily have sort of enlisted his help and backed the Shah and helped him or asked him to help him and would have had a much stronger hand both internally and externally had he done so.

Avery: Yes. I don't quite know enough about the details to know what went wrong. But of course, at the beginning the Shah did cooperate quite a long way with Mossadeq.

The Shah was like every other Iranian person. I've always believed that every single Iranian's heart (whether they were pro-British or anti-British or whatever they were) beat faster when the oil nationalization bill went through. Every Iranian was excited by this ousting of this long hosted power -- this guest that had overstayed its welcome in the oil company and in the south of Iran. Everyone, including Anglophiles, were all thrilled, actually, when it came to the crunch. And the Shah was also, of course, delighted. He was not opposed to what Mossadeq was doing at the beginning.

It was when the Shah began to see that Mossadeq was operating as a Prime Minister with the support of a Parliament -- a Majles -- that Mossadeq was, in fact, operating very much within the framework of the Iranian Constitution, that I think things began to go wrong. Because the one thing neither Pahlavi Shah seems to have been able to stomach was allowing the Iranian Constitution (the old Constitution) to operate, allowing the Majles (the Parliament) and the

Prime Minister too much power with the Prime Minister responsible to Parliament rather than responsible to the Shah.

Q: [Unclear]

Avery: Of course, the rift between the Shah and Mossadeq eventually rose about who should be Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and of course, was really a rift occasioned by the fact that Mossadeq had stolen the Shah's thunder. Mossadeq was, in fact, for a time ruling the country. I think that was the problem there.

Q: So you think that he actually stuck to the Constitution. You don't think that he went a little bit too far and totally discarded the Shah?

Avery: Mossadeq?

Q: Yes.

Avery: No, I don't think so. I think towards the end they wanted to discard the Shah. Of course, that would have been unconstitutional. The Constitution provides for the Shah just as it provided for the Prime Minister.

But I think in the earlier part the National Front, with people like Allahyar Saleh and so on -- It was very much the party of the Constitution. They were very much in the line of the "Mashrutch Khah" -- the old constitutionalist -- and remained so, people like Allahyar Saleh and Sanjabi.

The other National Front people always remained really upholders of the Constitution.

Shapur Bakhtiyar was the last Prime Minister who attempted to arrange things in such a way that the Constitution of 1905, 1906 should be eventually revived and given new life. One of the major tragedies about more recent events is the imposition of the thoroughly Islamic Constitution and the consequent demise of the old Constitution. Because I do believe that the old Constitution was a very workable constitution indeed. The tragedy was that it was never given really a chance.

Q: Never. And of course, as a result of not giving that one a chance, which was a moderately good constitution, now we are landed for the foreseeable future --

Avery: With something much worse.

Q: With something far, far worse. I mean, real murderous for the country. And God knows what will happen now. How would one go about--

Avery: Well again, it may be that representational institutions will eventually do something to restore the balance because one of the interesting things is, of course, its packed with a preponderance of the religious classes at the moment. But one of the interesting things is the way gradually the Majles (the Legislative Assembly) is coming to the fore and may be able to hold the balance in insuring some kind of debated properly formulated government -- not the ad hoc, capricious, arbitrary government of groups of individuals or a single charisma commanding individual or somebody like the former Shah -- a person who believes he has got a special mission to control Iran and to rule it in their way.

Until such times, of course, the Shah himself was a believer in the Constitution. His trouble was that he didn't think that the country was ready for it yet. But that "yet" was allowed to go on too long.

Q: [Unclear]

Avery: And then, when he did start to relax, of course, it was too late because he simply took the lid off a box of dissidents and opportunists and oppositionists that brought a revolution about.

Q: But, you know, if one looks back one sees the Shah having been brought up in Switzerland and everything. He was, obviously, naturally liberal.

Between 1941 and 1953 he acted as one. I mean, he was a Constitutional Monarch.

Avery: Yes. He didn't have much choice, of course.

A lot of the time, certainly between 1941 and 1946, the country was sharing part of the country with no less than three occupying military forces -- England, Russia and the United States.

But certainly, going back (as you just led me back, in fact) to that happy first visit of mine to Tehran -- Certainly then one felt one was living in a country of political freedom, of parliamentary freedom, of total freedom from secret police, total freedom from that terrible atmosphere of suspicion and fear that characterized lands that lacked freedom. This was a Tehran where one could walk up and down the streets with whomever one wished, of all political shades and have political conversations as loudly as you like and anywhere you like.

So that period, 1941 to 1953 -- Actually, I date the end of it with the rise of Mossadeq. [chuckles] Actually, the distresses and the strains of the Mossadeq period spelled the end of freedom, the beginning of policing, the beginning of the secret police, the beginning of kidnappings and people being taken out at night and tortured to death on distant country roads. The fate, incidently, under Mossadeq of no less a person than the Chief of Police himself, Afshartus, [chuckles] and so on.

This was the end of the sort of freedom that I experienced in Tehran in the winter of 1949, 1950. Never did I experience it again.

Q: Yes, but don't think (this is what I was saying) that the Shah allowed things to go as far as they could go?

It was only when things got out of hand and the abuse of that freedom (as you say) that led him to believe that, "Well, obviously, it can't go on like this. Now, I'm going to do it my way."

Avery: Well, it must be remembered that from 1953 to 1963 (broadly speaking), for another ten years he endeavored to rule with the Majles.

It was in 1961 that the Majles was finally suspended and he began the White Revolution and to rule by decree.

So from 1953 to 1961 he attempted some form of modified (shall we say) constitutional rule. Certainly, in 1961 one could, in sympathy with him, take it that the experiment had failed and he was now going to try and rule himself, though those were plenty of signs from 1954 onwards, I'm afraid -- growing signs -- that he wasn't really giving the Constitution a fair crack of the whip. There was plenty of signs: 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958 -- which were years when I was actually living in Tehran, when people were constantly complaining to me that it would be so much better if he reigned constitutionally, rather than ruled as he was doing, assuming all the responsibility.

As, of course, people used to say, "harche bamash bish, barfash bishtar," you see, I mean he was widening his roof so that the weight of the snow (as it were) -- the snow weight of responsibility -- on it would be the greater.

There was always this complaint. And there were people trying to advise him to go the other way -- Seyyed Ziyaoddin Tabataba'i being one of them. Others who advised him seemed very

short shrift, indeed. Ebrahim Khajenuri never got made a senator again after his attempts to state the Shah that "saltant kardan" to reign was better than to rule -- that sort of thing.

So that he was hardening his position and of course, already from the time of the fall of Mossadeq onwards was a suppression of communism and the operations of the SAVAK as it eventually became The "Amniyat" Security Organization. His position deteriorated very considerably. This, I blame the United States for. The Joseph McCarthy era in the United States was, in fact, transferred to the lands of United States' allies, by which I mean bases -- lands in which the United States desired to strengthen as fortresses against the spread of Soviet power. And you got appalling persecutions and tortures.

[end of side two of tape one]

Q: [tape began after interviewer spoke] Peter Avery here.

know you there.

Avery: I can't remember quite where we got to there.

Q: Yes. We got to -- You blamed the Americans.

Avery: Oh, yes. The Americans were so busy insuring a wall -- a bastion -- around that could contain Soviet expansionism that, of course, they (I think) must have encouraged with the sort of anti-communist drive which occurred in Iran -- especially on the declared discovery of communist cells in the armed forces.

I happen to know one young Army officer who was one of those taken. He was a young man who had talked to me in a restaurant over a meal once about his political beliefs and what he thought would be good for his country. He was an extremely mild and intelligent, sensitive young Iranian -- middle class person -- I would say.

And he talked to me in terms which I would describe, as an Englishman, as being liberal.

Q: What was his name? You can't remember?

Avery: No, I can't remember his name.

Therefore, I was horrified when I discovered two weeks later that he was one of the officers who'd been seized -- who'd been taken as Tudeh suspects.

I later did manage to gain information. He was very badly tortured. He never gave word after torture. He absolutely refused to recant or to break down. And he was eventually (I believe) killed or died. I'm not quite sure which.

Well, I of course wasn't going to make any kind of generalization on just one instance. But the point that I'm trying to make is that again attitudes were allowed to harden. Situations really like Mrs. Margaret Thatcher today and

When situations are allowed to become too black and white and get oversimplified, you're either for us or you're [against] us. You're either a sycophant to the Shah or you must be a deep dyed in the wool communist about to wreck the country. [There are] no allowances made for the possibility of Iranians being highly intelligent and of liberal inclinations. Most Iranians are ordinary, immensely pacific, immensely peace loving people and extremely intelligent people.

But the assumption is made somehow that they're wicked [chuckles] and destructive. And I think one has constantly -- never more than nowadays -- to re-assert the perennial values and

features of Iranian culture -- Iranian literature in particular -- to explain to the world what Iranians are really like.

My heart bleeds when I think of that young Iranian officer whom I had two or three evenings' talk with and who had later been captured among the Tudeh suspects and those terrible purges that took place accompanied by dreadful tortures and so on.

I was extremely worried about the torturing business. I was eventually able to do something about that. I couldn't persuade the British and the American Embassies to take any action because they said that the Shah would accuse them of interfering in the internal affairs of the sovereign state and so on. Though, unofficially, the British Embassy was kind enough to ask me if I'd like to seize the opportunity to tell my story to a very important British correspondent of The Observer newspaper. And I was able to arrange. Because as my friend in the Embassy said, he couldn't do it, of course, but I could, not being in any way an official. I was not an official in any way and had nothing whatever to do with the British government.

So he said to me, "You're in a free position."

This time I was working, you see, in the second visit to Tehran and I stayed there three and half years. I was actually working as P.A. to the General Manager of a British road contracting operation under the firm of Moles, a big civil engineering construction company. And so I was an ordinary civilian -- a lay person. Of course, many people in the United States and many people in Iran always believed that I was employed in some way or other by the British government. But I can assure all my friends and enemies that I have never in my life received any cash-free emoluments from the British government for any kind of agency or operation or employment since I left the Navy after the end of my war service. Professor Richard Cottam please take note--and others in the United States.

I'm visited today by research students from the United States who are quite surprised when I deny that I was ever in the MI6. They say, "Oh, Professor this and Professor that told us you were."

Q: [chuckles]

Avery: Well, I wasn't. Higher up in the State Department, of course, knew I wasn't, too. There was no question. [chuckles]

But being free, I was able to get this British correspondent -- who was very willing to do it -- to interview some of the people who'd been victims of torture. And he got a great deal of information together which he said he would file to his newspaper, The Observer -- an influential English Sunday paper of liberal pretensions. He would file the copy from Beirut.

He never got any of it published.

Q: Why not?

Avery: Well, one wonders. You might ask why.

He told me later that The Observer newspaper wouldn't touch it. They wouldn't touch it. This was 1955, 1956. I can't remember precisely which of those two years it was. But you see, a British newspaper was not going to run at that time such an appalling exposure of the seamier side of the Shah's regime. So it wasn't published. All my friend got out was a short article in the New Statesman and Nation for which he also acted as a stringer.

So my efforts to get the story out failed there. So then I was reduced to another tactic. I happened to know Teymur Bakhtiyar quite well. He was the Military Governor of Tehran and (at that time) in charge of the security operation. So it was arranged -- to cut a long and intriguing story short -- Mohammad Baqer, who was an old "Akhund" I knew, and the late Tamaddonol-molk Sajjadi, who was the British Embassy's chief Iranian interpreter and counselor, adviser. Mohammad Baqer, Tamaddonol-molk and I arranged that we would have lunch with Teymur Bakhtiyar to try and stop the torturing. [chuckles] And so this is what we did.

We informed Teymur Bakhtiyar that we would like to have lunch with him. Of course, he was