

[end of side two of tape two]

Q: This is tape number three with Peter Avery.

Well, they probably wouldn't have had so much...

very: This is to talk about the period after 1963. 1963 was one of the turning points.

Q: But wait a minute. I would like to go back to 1953 now.

Avery: But to return to 1953 -- Because you must understand that I was no longer living in Iran in 1963. I left Iran in the end of 1957.

To go back to the 1953 period -- the fall of Mossadeq.

Q: What happened?

So you were there when the Shah left the first time.

Avery: No, I was not. I was in Baghdad when the Shah fled over Hosein Fatemi's, the Foreign Minister, and Mohammad Mossadeq's, the Prime Minister, attempt to insure the establishment of an Islamic republic. Mossadeq, after all, consistently following the line -- He followed as one of those who, in 1925 in the Constituent Assembly established to decide the constitutional position with the departure of the Qajar dynasty, had voted against Reza Shah Pahlavi's assumption of

sovereignty. Mossadeq was a consistent opponent of the Pahlavi regime, after all. And of course, Mossadeq at the end of his Premiership in 1953 had attempted to present the Shah with an ultimatum the Shah couldn't accept over the Commander In Chiefship of the Armed Forces, claiming it for the Prime Minister.

And the Shah fled Iran. I was in Baghdad at the time, teaching in the Kollatol-Adab wa 'Olum -- the College of Arts and Sciences, the University College in Iraq -- when the

Agence France Press representative, who was a friend of mine suddenly telephoned me in the middle of the morning and said, "The Shah of Iran and his wife are at the airport." I was very surprised, as everybody was.

King Feysal had a diplomatic cold and couldn't see them, but placed the Palace at their disposal. However, they flew on that evening -- two people having been pushed off the scheduled flight of B.O.A.C. The Shah of Persia and his spouse flew on to Rome. And as the world now knows, of course, they eventually -- not many days later (I think about three days later) -- returned to Iran in triumph. A coup d'etat having been staged with Zahedi at its head which everybody claims and historians have attempted to substantiate that the United States -- through its C.I.A. organization -- had heavily supported this shout in the street. I think that there must have been other underlying factors, such as fear of chaos and fear of anarchy and what might happen.

Q: What do you think it was -- aside from the C.I.A.?

Let us set aside the C.I.A. because I really never believed that any organization can, by distributing dollar notes, actually raise suddenly a hundred thousand people to go and shout in the street. I think that there must have been other underlying factors, such as fear of chaos and fear of anarchy and what might happen.

Avery: I entirely agree with you.

I think it's a great pity that the Iranians, commenting on the history of their country, can never convince themselves that they -- by themselves -- are capable of changing situations.

Q: Doing things.

Avery: They always have to blame foreign agencies for any action that occurs, which of course, foreign agencies cannot entirely (as we've seen in more recent years under the Khomeini regime) effect changes if the people are against them.

I think the people were tired of Mossadeq and of the economic chaos that the country was being reduced to under Mossadeq's government. Without any oil revenues coming in the treasury was empty. And this was widely known [and] widely commented upon by Iranians. There was nothing in the treasury. Iranians are essentially a nation of traders -- a fact which is not (I think) sufficiently understood or emphasized. Even if it is understood it's not sufficiently stated.

It's always worth remembering that one of the survival qualities of Iran (and Iran's survival is always being commented upon) -- But how does this survival take effect? What are the causes of it?

One of the main survival threads in Iranian history is its capacity as a middle nation -- a middle place -- geographically placed world of merchants and traders -- people who handle goods, pass goods on (in the old days, of course) along the silk road from the Far East. But always a nation of goods handlers -- of traders. This is very basic. This is why Iranians are so pragmatic. Because they are all potentially merchants. They are not soldiers. They are pacific people. They're not warriors, really. They're much more pragmatic merchants -- men of the bazaar -- of the market place.

Deep down, though, they're most everlasting and most subtle relationships with the external world are the relationships of marketplaces -- the relationships of merchants. Whenever I think

of the way Iran has survived through the ages I always remember once wanting to go from Baghdad to Esfahan

[tape stopped while Mr. Avery was speaking and started up again in the middle of a sentence]

-- saying to a friend of mine in Baghdad, "How shall I arrange for the transfer of money to Esfahan?"

And he said, "Come with me tomorrow morning into the bazaar."

And he took me into the bazaar -- the "suq" -- to a little old man in a tiny little boutique. And he said, "Give him your hundred pounds or whatever the sum as you require" -- it was, in fact, a hundred Iraq dinars (in those days, equivalent to a hundred pounds) -- which I did. And the old man gave me in return a small piece of brown packing paper, not much bigger than the average postage stamp, on which he's scribbled something in "siaq" -- in that letter alphabetical type of notation that old fashioned Islamic merchants used to use, and which was an international language (code).

And he said, "Take this to the third on the left in the coppersmith's bazaar." That's all.

I was over-apprehensive. It wasn't much to have in return for a hundred pounds. However, I got to Esfahan. And the first morning I walked out and found the third on the left in the coppersmith's bazaar and handed him this scrap of paper to which he responded by saying, "Yes. How do you want it? Do you want to collect a sum each week so that I act as your banker? Or do you want it all now?"

Well, I said, "Oh, I'd be very grateful if you could just keep it for me and I'll come and get some each week as I need it."

And this is one of the great strengths of the Islamic world and of Iran who suddenly revealed to me that underneath the rise and fall of sultans and the interchange of governments and the exercise of foreign influences and all the rest of what makes up most of what's in our history



books. Underneath this -- here was something that must have been going on for centuries. Little old men in the third boutique on the left in such and such a bazaar who could send a tiny piece of paper with a mark on it to somebody else, which would represent a hundred pounds and be quite sufficient. Here was a subtle substratum of power. And it was power associated with bazaars.

If you want to take it further, think in terms of the rise of the 'Abassid Caliphate in 745, 750 A.D. Again, I believe it was through networks of merchants from Medina to Marv that the news, the propaganda, the instructions, the organization was spread.

You want to take it to the rise of Khomeini from 1963 onwards to 1979 and the revolution? It was again merchants who entirely financed the whole affair.

So there we are. Anyway, this is a long digression into --

Q: But no. This is interesting simply because one of the theories of the discontent which contribute [to the] fall of the Shah is that by giving a lot of free reign to new traditional bazaaris.

Avery: The traditional bazaar -- the traditional ways of mercantile practice in Iran were threatened by the Pahlavi government with its modern ideas. It's what they used to call its boulevard trade or avenue trade as opposed to the old bazaar methods of trading. The establishment of things like department stores and that kind of thing -- The bazaar merchants felt gravely threatened and this was one of the aspects of the threat to traditional ways and cherished, traditional mores that the Pahlavi government presented and which I believe was one of the major factors in the opposition to the Pahlavis.

In 1953 --

Q: Could it have been avoided? I mean, could one have introduced modern methods of trade and kept the bazaaris happy?

Avery: It's very important. There's a phrase, isn't there, in the Persian language "bekenar amadan ba kasi"-- to go to one's side. Literally, I suppose it means coming to one's side with somebody. It's very important in Iranian conditions which are said to be characterized by individualism. What this individualism (I suppose) really means is that everybody considers that their dignity and their capacity to participate and to contribute to the life of the community necessitates their having the right to be consulted.

One of the things that rulers in Iran have to do is to work on a consensus basis. Iran is (as it were) naturally instinctively democratic insofar as Iranians do like to be consulted and like things to work on a consensus basis. One of the ways in which Iran could have been reformed successfully was if the great merchants and the more pragmatic elements of the society -- not necessarily idle landed magnates who played at politics as if it were another extension of the galley games they played (gambling games mostly). A nation of gamblers, you could say they represented. Not that sort of person, but pragmatic people who had a real stake in the country. And this really is the merchants, the traders and the businessmen and so on. There should have been far more consultancy instead of the assumption by the Head of the State that his subjects needed leading, needed educating, that it was his mission to lead and educate them, that they were naive and didn't understand modern ways. This was an extremely incorrect and arrogant assumption to make.

Q: So anyway, you were in Baghdad on and the Shah left and came back. And so what happened then? Did you go back to Tehran?

Avery: Well, in 1954 an Iranian friend of mine, with whom I'd left some books and rugs and things when I left Iran on the nationalization of the oil company, wrote to me and said he didn't even know where I was. But he found me by writing to the Anglo Iranian Oil Company who gave

him my home address. And eventually he was able to reach me to say why didn't I go up to Tehran and claim these rugs and possessions of mine.

Q: Did you have to leave after the nationalization?

Avery: Well, no. As I've said earlier on in an earlier tape, that we were all evacuated from the oil company.

Q: Oh, that's right. Yes, I remember now.

Avery: And so I went up to Tehran, and of course, found it in the grip of fear due to the first anti-communist purge that was going on and indeed discovered that my friend's real reason for wanting to see me was that he wanted me to help him to get out. He was in danger of being taken on suspicion of being a communist.

Q: He wanted you to help him get out.

Avery: Yes. He wanted me to help him to get out. He got a job as a Persian lecturer in Cambridge due to my recommendation. He'd been my assistant in the oil company education department.

Q: What was his name?

Avery: Well, since he's still alive and in London I won't give his name.

Anyway, he was not arrested. He escaped and came to England and did a Ph.D. in Cambridge. He later went back to the oil company.

That was my first return to Iran since 1951. Then in 1955 a friend of mine, who was Technical Director and a big Civil Engineer of the Molem Company which had got a great contract for road building, invited me to become the P.A. to the General Manager. So in 1955 I returned and stayed there until coming to Cambridge in the end of 1957. And a very interesting experience it was.

This was an Iran that was attempting, with help from the World Monetary Fund and the International Bank, to restore itself and get itself placed for a big development takeoff by means of, first of all, establishing the necessary technological infrastructure which it so badly lacked. So you can say that the process that was embarked upon between 1954 and 1958 for the restoration and revivification of an Iran that had been allowed to run down very badly under Mossadeq might have been high on the satisfaction of the aspirations for freedom and abstraction of that kind, [chuckles] that it was very low on actual maintenance of roads and the maintenance of the railway system. And [it was] extremely low on providing money for these activities.

So General Zahedi's government set about (I think very efficiently indeed), with valuable help from the experts of the World Bank and so on, first of all, to tackle things like the roads. Because the roads in Iran by this time were very bad indeed. They'd been started under the reign of Reza Shah in the 1930s with the advent of the motor car. They'd been rapidly expanded during the war for the movement of Middle East goods from the Gulf to the Caspian and Russian borders. But they'd not been maintained. Therefore, by 1955 they were badly broken up to be almost unusable. The roads, in fact, weren't being used for lorries, just developed tracks beside the roads where it was possible on flat ground.

So I became part of this movement to redevelop the country and set about valuable basic construction work. But I left in 1958.

1963 was the next turning point in which I became very much aware.



Q: No, but during that period -- Aside from that, you were in contact with your old friends, with the literary world and so on.

Avery: Oh yes, of course. This work -- Yes, I had friends in the literary world -- acquaintances which I could in some instances resume.

Sadeq Hedayat, of course, was dead. Bozorg 'Alavi was in exile abroad. Baqa'i I never met again -- the founder of the Toiler's Party. But I've known Mas'ud Farzad for years. Mas'ud Farzad was a Shirazi. Yes, he was very close to me. But of course, I knew him mostly in London because he lived mostly in London. The last time I saw him was in Shiraz to which he retired just before his death. He'd been a close associate in earlier days with Sadeq Hedayat and collaborated with him -- the book on vegetarianism and other works. I have somewhere a photograph of them together.

Q: Anjavi, who was he?

Avery: Sa'id Anjavi was another friend who became a friend during my 1955, 1957 period in Iran, who was a very close friend of Sadeq Hedayat and close to him when he died in Paris.

And of course, I saw a great deal of people like Dr. Khanlari, Mojtaba Minovi and other scholars with whom I shared scholarly interests and from whom I learned a great deal about Persian literature. Though I learned most from the person I was with most of the time, and that was Seyyed Sadeq Goharin whom I became extremely close to and with whom I began the translation of the *Mantiqotteyr* of Farideddin 'Attar, which I am at long last (thirty years later) bringing to a conclusion -- a translation which will be fully annotated and constitute a sort of encyclopedia of Sufisim and of Islamic theology, I think, by the time we're finished. Because the

Mantiqotteyr is such a seminal work -- so absolutely central to the understanding both of Islam and of Sufisim, more particularly, of course, of the latter.

Well, I began that on manuscripts that Minovi had discovered -- two manuscripts in Turkey in Ankara and Istambul -- two extremely ancient manuscripts which were much purer, nearer what we believed to be the original text and any manuscripts since it had been seen before.

So that whilst I was P.A. to the General Manager of a road building operation during the day, during the night I was the student of Sufisim and Persian letters and was busy translating the Mantiqotteyr and working on other things in Seyyed Sadeq Goharin's library. I lived a sort of double life. And it was an extremely interesting and fruitful period for me.

The other aspect of the job which was useful and constructive to me as a student of Iran, was that I was then able to get all over Iran, and secondly, to practice the language at all levels as an interpreter -- interpreting in weekly meetings between my principles and Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj, who was the Managing Director of the Iranian Plan Organization who were our clients. We were engineers working for the Plan Organization. So I was at meetings there which were conducted in English, French and Persian. And I had to be the interpreter [chuckles] in all three languages. And also, of course, I had frequent meetings with the Minister of Roads and Railways, "Timsar" General Ansari with whom I became extremely friendly, as I did with Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj who became close friends of mine and were both men I greatly admired. Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj, of course, was an exceptionally dynamic and clever man whose great fault was (as I frequently told him) -- Because my communications with these men -- I was friendly enough with them for my communications to be extremely frank and open. We treated each other as real friends as one can do with Iranians who become real friends -- men of immense sophistication and openness. A character in mind --del be del rah darad--as Sadeq Hedayat had taught me all those years before -- heart finds a way to the heart. And as I frequently told Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj, his great flaw was that he never listened to anybody. [chuckles] I said that on the whole I believed great men, including even Napoleon and certainly the Duke of Wellington -- generalists who have been great listeners. But I said I'd never seen him listen to anybody. [chuckles] He was always finishing other people's sentences for them and talking them down. And this I thought was a pity.

But of course, it was one of the tragedies of the later years of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's dreary reign, which ended in the dreariest of revolutions, that anybody at all critical of him, such as Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj, were very quickly driven out -- driven out of affairs, driven out of politics and mistreated. I mean, Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj was, after all, kept endurance vile in the vilest kind of imprisonment for quite a long time with all sorts of ridiculous charges being held over him, and eventually released in bail terms which would have been impossible for the entire financial community of the world, actually, to have sustained -- millions.

Q: What were the charges against him?

Avery: Oh, charges of interference, speculation, corruption and so on -- charges which were totally unjust. Never was there a more honest and more straightforward and more uncorrupt official in any government in the world than Abol-Hasan Ebtehaj. He was a very, very fine man and a man I greatly admire. I'm happy to say that friends who see him in his exile these days (I believe somewhere in the south of France) have pleased and flattered me no end by telling me that in his conversations with them he always speaks well of me. And I would like to use this opportunity to reciprocate this. He was a very great man and a good friend. He was a joy to be with -- witty, experienced, worldly, learned and of the best character of Iranian. And when you get a good Iranian you can find no one better.

"Timsar" Ansari was the sort of official and friend who, as soon as he noticed that I was tired and getting a little bit worn, suddenly gave me instructions -- as he put it "orders" -- to go to the North and stay in one of the hotels and have a Derazin -- a small inspection train put in my disposal on the railway lines so that I could go for trips and see various Safavid remains in that area between Babolsar and Asgharabad -- in that area of the country. That was the kind of thing -- a little holiday arranged for me with every curtesy and kindness. An Iranian gentleman [was] allowed to accompany me to act as my escort and to look after whatever it was I needed.

I remember reading the Tarikh-e Sistan during that trip, sitting in the garden of the hotel of Babolsar reading this great history when I wasn't being taken on interesting trips exploring



historical remains or wasn't having a swim in the Caspian Sea. These are the happy memories of Iran -- the memory of which moves me deeply. Because I have to say that the principle joys and all the most enriching experiences of my life have been associated with that country. Therefore, one is extremely glad (in my case, anyway) being a student of Iran.

Q: So those were the years that you spent there. What was the atmosphere like? I mean, there was a feeling of renewal -- that things were moving and rebuilding.

Avery: There was the feeling of -- There was an attempt on the part of the government (especially on the part of Prime Minister Zahedi and his associates) to get things moving.

"Tout le monde de temps en temps est egoiste," as Ahmad Shah is supposed to have said. A lot of this movement, of course, was not to be disassociated from self interest on the part of some of the parties concerned in it.

Great families like the Rashidiyans and certain members of the Hedayat family -- incidentally, relations of my late friend, Sadeq Hedayat -- and other great groups had formed groups to promote civil engineering to become contractors and to acquire plant, earth moving equipment and that sort of thing, which Iran was extremely low in and which was part of the revival program to insure that Iran had adequate supplies of. But supplies of which would be, whilst financed on credit, forwarded by the British government and other western governments -- supplies which would remain a monopoly in the hands of a very few. Which would have given that very few, of course, very great political power because they would have been in control of a vital technological requirement.

These are aspects of modern Iran history worth mentioning and certainly treating in more detail when the occasion presents itself.

So there was a lot of this going on. And therefore, you asked about the atmosphere. The



prospects for the future, as I saw it, was that I was aware of this dynamic desire to improve the infrastructure. I was also haunted by the belief that the Pahlavi regime was doomed -- a belief that came to me strongly in 1955 in the context of that "boghaz" I've mentioned earlier, the context of what was going on, what was being done to people and the people's gradual alienation from the Shah and the feeling that there was the danger (as I saw it then) of a communist takeover.

I remember being almost haunted by a strange sort of hunch or premonition as I crossed, one winter's evening, an empty Takht-e Jamshid (as it was called) -- the big avenue stretching across northern Tehran in those days -- and seeing a rather broken down truck going along and nothing else, and thinking to myself, "Is Iran going someday to be like this -- silent, oppressed, tyrannized over, a satellite perhaps of Russia? Tehran a city of southern Russia like something out of a Gorky short story -- paint peeling off doors, snow, frozen slush in the wintertime, people hungry and queuing for food." A very strange sort of premonition.

[end of side one of tape three]

Avery: A vague sort of a premonition of a post-Pahlavi Iran in the grips of tyranny, economic shortage. The sort of thing that arises from planned economies. And I was so upset by it that I went to a friend of mine in the British Embassy, John Fernley, and told him about it. I said, "I must be going out of my head."

He said, "I don't think you are at all. I think you've had a real glimpse of what the future might hold".

He and I were pessimistic about the future of the Pahlavi Dynasty. And this, I must remind you, was in 1955.

Q: But didn't anybody try to -- I mean, obviously you were not the only one to have this kind of feeling. But wasn't there anyone to articulate this feeling and pass it on?

Avery: No. It seems that certainly the foreign embassies didn't risk the Shah's obliquity and anger -- his wrath -- by mentioning the fact to him that certain aspects of his conduct might be arousing a great deal of hostility to his regime.

It seems that he believed -- and of course, plenty of other people did, too, presumably -- that he was a dearly loved figure. This was a belief that increased and persisted almost to the eve of his departure from Iran in 1979. I thought it was quite wrong to suppose that he was a greatly loved figure.

Other people -- Western commentators used rather to mock me. I remember once there was somebody saying to me, "Are you still looking for the revolution in Iran under your desk every morning when you get up?"

And I used to say, "Yes. And the day I stop looking for it is no doubt the day it will happen."

That was in 1955, 1956, 1957.

Of course, I was exposed to a certain amount of anti-regime pessimism in the talk of certain groups that I was in touch with. I was, for example, in fairly close touch with General Qarane'i who was, in fact, in charge of the Deuxieme Bureau of the General Staff -- the intelligence gathering part of the General Staff. I had contacts with him in connection with the road building operation because I had to get permits from him to visit certain areas of Iran. I became very friendly with him. He was a typical Turk -- fairly simple, straightforward man, a man of great charm, a man I grew to respect. But strangely enough, I had no idea (although I met him in certain circles and there was a lot of critical comment of the government) -- But it never occurred to me that these people were actually thinking in terms of the possibility of a coup d'etat against the government. Simply because the kind of conversation they were having was the sort of conversation, which to me as an Englishman, was a perfectly natural conversation -- the kind of conversation we would have in England or in France about the government, where governments

are criticized by ordinary intelligent people in their private gatherings and dinner parties and so on.

These groups used to meet about once a week and there would be a certain amount of tut-tutting and expressions of regret over what were considered maladroit aspects of the Shah's policy over the torturing of the suspected political dissidents and so on.

Q: But if in those days --

Avery: It wasn't until after I left, of course, that Qarane'i was arrested and cashiered from the Army for having actually plotted against the Shah.

Q: What was the plot?

Avery: I don't know.

He had eventually been naive enough to go to the C.I.A. and take C.I.A. officials into his confidence, so I heard. And of course, the C.I.A. officials then immediately revealed all to the Shah -- all of which strikes me as being really rather childish and horrible and low and mean. They sneaked on General Qarane'i.

Q: Yes. But there was a period then, it seems to me, that after the quick purge of the top brass of the Tudeh Party after 1953 -- There was sort of a calming down in the political dissidents and that there wasn't too much arrest or torture or anything of the kind. At least it never came out. The people that started talking about arrests and tortures when guerilla movements started in Iran and where there was another clampdown after 1963.



Avery: Yes. Arrest and torture went on until 1955. And then, as I said in the context of my meeting with Teymur Bakhtiyar, things quieted down and I came out in 1958. And then in the early -- Shortly after that in 1958, 1959, Teymur Bakhtiyar himself, of course, became suspect as an enemy of the Shah and had to leave the country.

Then, in 1963, after the Shah's proclamations of 1961 when the Shah began his White Revolution and the famous "Farman" was issued in which the Prime Minister was extracted -- the Prime Minister in this case being 'Ali Amini -- and the reforms being reforms introduced because John F. Kennedy really wanted them to be introduced so it was part of the trimming operation to bring the ship of state in Iran onto the sort of tack that the new look presidency of the United States -- the Kennedy presidency -- seemed to require. And the great "Farman" was issued -- the Shah instructing 'Ali Amini (though the "Farman" seems largely to be written by 'Ali Amini) to institute the land reform, to institute various other things which became characteristic features of the White Revolution in the absense of the Majles which had been suspended due to repeated corruption in its elections.

That was the beginning of a totally new phase which was, of course, opposed by the "ulama" because they saw in it the erosion of their hold on wealth from endowments in land. They saw further erosion of their influences partly as educators and as controllers of the minds and hearts of the people. They must have seen -- as did left wing opponents of the regime -- They must have realized that this was the Shah's great moment to capture the hearts of the people, to out-Herod all the other reformists of opposition groups by proving himself the arch-reformer -- "the revolution from the top" as he, himself, would put it.

So by 1963, after a series of protests from "ulama" circles that principally centered on Qom which was, well, was where the great schools of theologies where you got riots and which were very, very severely repressed at the point of the bayonet, so to speak, and which were thought by some (I do believe), including Hoveyda who became a long lasting Prime Minister, to signal the



end of the "ulama" -- the last kick, the last struck of the religious conservative, traditionalist authorities in Iran against progress.

The 1963 suppression of these elements was so great that it was considered that that was the end.

In 1968 Hoveyda, himself, said to me words which, of course, subsequently burnt in my memory. When I asked him, I said, "What about the religious classes' attitude towards progress et cetera?" It was in 1968.

He said, "The religious classes? Oh, that's all over. When I became Prime Minister I asked predecessors what they did about the religious classes. And they said, 'We hold a "shabneshini" let it be known that religious leaders and others of the religious classes are welcome. And they come along and we entertain them and establish a kind of rapport with them.'"

"And I said," Hoveyda continued, "that I was in my office from 6:00 A.M. every day and if any of the religious classes wanted to see me they would know where to find me -- in my office. The religious classes -- I think their power is finished."

And I remember as he said it, involuntarily glancing at the long French windows reaching to the floor which was parallel to the chair on which he was sitting behind his desk as he was talking to me, and thinking to myself, "My goodness, I hope the glass in that window is bullet-proof." Because I was aware that anybody in Iran -- even in 1968 -- who thought that the religious classes were no longer an issue, were no longer capable of doing anything, was most likely eventually to receive a bullet in their flesh, fired by a gun held by a member of the religious classes.

And that was, of course, what happened.

Q: Why didn't you tell him, Peter?

[unclear]

Avery: Well, I didn't. I was simply seeking information. I wasn't there to have a [chuckles] political argument about his country.

And of course, you should know, being Iranian yourself, that it isn't very easy to tell an Iranian in office something that he doesn't want to hear and doesn't agree with.

That kind of meeting I had with my old friend, Amir 'Abbas Hoveyda. It wasn't I who was telling him things. It was he who was very much telling me. The arrogance, the confidence that Iranians in high office at least showed, it was always a matter of surprise to me in view of the fragility of [chuckles] public positions throughout the history of Iran.

Similarly with the Shah -- Because in 1975 Asadollah 'Alam, who was a very old friend of mine, told me that his problem was that he could no longer converse with Shah. He could no longer attempt to question any of the Shah's decisions because he, Asadollah 'Alam's, health was so bad that he could no longer stand, he said. The outbursts of ill-temper arouse that would ensue if he endeavored to question any of the Shah's decisions or opinions. So it went right to the top.

Asadollah 'Alam, himself, was never an arrogant man, I would like to add. He was always a quiet, listening type of person. And had my conversation been with Asadollah, I could probably -- would probably -- have argued with him and said, "Oh, I don't agree. I think I should watch the religious classes." But then, the situation wouldn't have arisen because Asadollah 'Alam would never have said that about the religious classes. It was Hoveyda who said it. Men so different in their outlook.

Q: If I may say something here. It seems to me that under Reza Shah the religious mollahs, at any rate -- the top brass -- were much more suppressed. I mean, they were not allowed to wear

their religious clothes at the universities, all manner of things like that. I mean, he somehow managed to deal with them.

The late Shah gave them a lot more free reign. I mean, "rowzeh-khani" was re-established, the mosques -- everything. There was a lot more religious freedom, in fact, than under Reza Shah, you see.

It seems now, in hindsight, that all he had to do was to enlist the help of a few and then get rid of the radical elements like Khomeini and everything would have been all right.

So I really don't -- It's very difficult to understand that -- why the religious classes didn't do anything under Reza Shah when they were really suppressed and put in their places, but that they opposed the late Shah so much. When he gave them a lot of money -- he put them all on retainer, so to speak. He gave them so much money. He gave them so much free reign. He allowed them to speak freely -- all manner of things like that.

It seems to me that one of the reasons was that they really wanted power. And he gave them just enough free reign to think that they could have that power and that they wanted more. Had he suppressed them completely, maybe it would not happen. Maybe -- I don't know. It seems to me that they took advantage of a situation of general discontent.

Avery: Yes. Well, of course, Reza Shah was a very much more successful dictator than his son ever was. Reza Shah was an extremely strong man of whom everybody was very afraid. Nobody was actually afraid of the Shah in the same way.

Secondly, the son certainly gave them, the mollahs a certain amount of freedom and indeed provided them with subsidies. Well, it was a kind of freedom that made them think that if they pressed hard enough they could get more.

Q: That's it.

Avery: And thirdly, he was diverted from the idea, for example, of executing Khomeini. He was always easily persuaded not to execute leading members of the religious classes, though several did, in fact, die in jail -- probably put to death or dying of tortures. But in the case of Khomeini the Shah, of course, spared his life which, in the event, can only be said to have been a grave mistake [chuckles] on his part.

But of course, it must be remembered that the trouble really started when Amuzegar, one of his last Prime Ministers, precipitously stopped the subsidies to the religious classes.

Q: Yes. But it was very quickly restored.

Avery: It was restored, but it was still considered by some Iranian observers of the revolution to have been what triggered off the difficulties. Be that as it may. I don't know why it was that the -- The Shah did, of course, laterally stop paying any kind of attention to Islamic principles.

And one of the key things -- It was in 1971. The celebration of two thousand five hundred years of Iranian monarchy. A lot of this flew very much in the face of Islamic tradition as well as in the face of historical accuracy. It was a party to which I was invited, but which I did not go to because I couldn't believe that it would be correct for anybody who thought of himself as a historian of Iran to support a so unhistorically, unauthentic event, in terms of history. And also, I did realize that it was an affront. It constituted a very grave affront to the Islamic principles of the nation.

Q: Why?

Avery: Because it played up a pre-Islamic Iran. Cyrus was the hero of the day, not Mohammad the Prophet or 'Ali, the first Imam after Mohammad. It played up entirely pre-Islamic ethics,



pre-Islamic heroes, pre-Islamic national leaders and so on. So it was a terrible affront to Islam and was taken as such by the mollahs, by many Iranians at the time. And it was also an extremely expensive exercise at a time when many Iranians were very short of food and money. It was a very extravagant affair. And it was an affair put on by the Shah for the entertainments of hosts, of foreign guests. So it had constituted that type of foreign invasion of Iranian privacy which Iranians do resent.

One of the notable examples of this resentment was the 1890, 1892 protests against the tobacco concession. [This was] partly because the tobacco concession was a terrible invasion of Iranian privacy. It put the processing and the marketing of a commodity which touched the mouths of numerous Iranians who smoked pipes in the hands of foreigners. Iranians don't like foreigners to be too prominent on the horizon or having too much obvious influence in the affairs of their country.

And again, the Shah's policy led to the introduction of thousands of principally American advisors and so on, of one sort and another. And the Iranians didn't like the ubiquity of them in their country.

So all these were factors building up to a disposition to criticize the Pahlavi regime. And things like the celebration of [two] thousand, five hundred years of monarchy were (I think) unwise, imprudent gestures.

Q: Yes. Well, at the time I remember going there to do a story for a newspaper here. And I put these objections quite frankly.

Avery: Yes.

Q: And I was told what was on the plus side of the exercise, which is that number one -- A great deal of good works got done as a result of the celebration -- you know, like the improvement of

roads and because of the celebration they're going to have so many new schools and so many new hospitals and so many new things which all got done, as it were, which wouldn't have otherwise.

And the second thing was the P.R. aspect of it, which was to bring all these foreigners to the country [and] let them see for themselves what was happening, and therefore, invest in the country and enhance trade with the country and so forth.

So that was on the plus side of it. I don't know if you think that worked or not.

Avery: No, I don't think it worked at all.

As for the P.R., it gave Iran rather a bad image abroad because a good many people did criticize it and didn't like the extravagance and didn't know what it was all about anyway. And those of us who did know what it was about did, in fact, know who Cyrus was and what the history was and, of course, realized that it was phony history. So I don't think it achieved very much.

As for schools and roads -- Well, you'd expect a modern, stridently progressive, noisily progressive developing nation to be building schools and roads anyway, without having to celebrate [chuckles] two thousand, five hundred years of monarchy with a lot of foreign guests and Maxim's providing hundreds of chefs to provide French food in a country who's food is exquisite, who's cuisine is quite as marvelous if not much more wonderful than the French.

One wouldn't expect all these adjuncts to be necessary for the encouragement of building roads and schools. I mean, such an assumption seems to me to be absolute nonsense. No, I think it all about how to increase the grandeur and the pomp and the power and so on of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. I think it grossly misfired and was certainly a factor in his downfall.

Then in 1975, four years later, when he declared a one party state -- Well, I was asked by the BBC to say what I thought of it. I said, "Well, he wants to cut down factionalism" because one of the problems of trying to get a democratic institution to work in Iran was the factionalism -- this

individualism which Iran is so notorious for -- people breaking up into small factions, the proliferation of political parties and so on. And I assume that one of his motives was the establishment of a one party state. But I realized at the time that it was an extremely dangerous move because, of course, it smacked on one party states which we don't like, which lead to dictatorships.

Q: The majority of the countries of the world at the moment are run by one party systems -- huge countries like Russia, China, all the satellites, all of the new applicants --

Avery: Yes. We don't consider the Russian system as one to emulate.

Q: Of course not. But nobody seemed to have objected to that, whereas everybody sort of jumped on the Shah's...

Avery: Oh, a lot of people (I think) do object to one party states and certainly regret friends emulating it.

Anyway, that was a dangerous move, but not perhaps all that dangerous because not very many people took much notice of it. But of course, it was a serious move because, in effect, the declaration of the Rastakhiz party -- the Resurrection Party of Iran -- did suggest that anybody who didn't join it was more or less an outlaw -- no longer a valid citizen of the country -- who could take his passport and go -- that sort of thing. That was a bad move.

And other moves like the establishment of the corps -- the literacy corp -- and other (I think) quite positive moves connected with land reform, of course, had their negative impact in that they introduced the government, the civil service, the administration much more into the lives of the people. They started to send out arms -- tentacles -- of government into the remotest villages and areas in Iran. Again, a kind of invasion of this privacy that Iranians do cherish. It's one of the



numerous paradoxes of Iran that life is not (more than in hardly any country I can think of) lived as publicly. And yet, whole areas of the family are totally private. The male members of the family -- the leading members of the family -- live (as it were) ostensibly with a great degree of publicity. But, actually, they live very privately behind the scenes. And so in a country which superficially seems fairly public, there is a tremendous sense of privacy and guarding of privacy.

The introduction by the Shah of foreigners, foreign experts, foreign investigators into things, foreign improvers of the way people went to the lavatory and the way people might wipe their bottoms and so on -- [chuckles] All these things were an appalling affront (I believe) to a nation that is as intensely private as the Iranian nation.

So these were the sort of things that made me pessimistic for the survival of the Pahlavi dynasty.

However, after 1963 I was not particularly distressed. I was distressed at the methods used which were cruel and horrible, but I was not particularly distressed at the cowering of the clerical classes because I've never been a great sympathizer with the clerical classes.

Q: But you see, the point is that at least half the clerics since the Safavids, in fact, since the advent of Shiism, have been perhaps the biggest element of stagnation and backwardness and corruption.

Avery: Stagnation, corruption and greed. Yes.

And so from 1963, I slightly changed my stance and thought with the increased gross national product, the increased economic activity, the almost fanatic economic activity that began after 1963, I began to assume (I was rather lulled) into the position of assuming that somehow that Dynasty would survive because of the enormous activity and my former pessimism had perhaps been misplaced. I went on thinking like that.

In 1968 I wrote an article for Chatham House's The World

Today, "A Mood of Increasing Confidence" I think I called it -- about how much more confidence I'd discovered in Iran on a recent trip there. That was 1968.

Then I went in 1977 and I'd been in the interim and begun to see signs that again justified pessimism -- made pessimism necessary. I began to hear rumors. I began to think, "Well, possibly, the trouble is that I'm always mixing with people who are critical of the regime. Perhaps I'm being fared with too much pessimism--"badbini"--[chuckles] Anyway, pessimism is, after all, a characteristic of Iranians who are essentially highly idealistic and to whom any sublunary [chuckles] situation, any mundane situation is, in fact, a subject of pessimism. Iranians just don't believe in sublunary promises. Iranians think that only in Heaven is perfection. No perfection is to be expected here on earth. This is absolutely central to Iranian religious belief -- always has been.

A lot of my Iranian friends were very Iranian people, indeed, who spread a lot of gloom in their conversations with me. But they did cite instances which were very disturbing. Then came the Shah's attempt to stop inflation by simply beating people into lowering their prices and popping merchants by the dozen into prison and so on on the charge of overcharging. Well, this was, of course, an absurdity, creating a great deal of cruelty and unhappiness.

So that by 1977, when I visited Iran and found from bankers that millions of tomans were being taken out of people's personal accounts and deposited abroad. By that date, it was in 1975, and in 1977, in my next visit, (I think) that I began really to apprehend danger.

It was in 1975 that Asadollah 'Alam told me he could no longer have a rational conversation with the ruler. The monomania had got so great. The British Ambassador at the time said that to me, "The monomania is so appalling" and the Shah --

And I remember saying, "Oh, monomania is a term I don't like to use of anybody. I can't say it. I keep it specially for Adolf Hitler."

And he said, "Well, whatever you do with the term 'monomania' I'm going to use it of the Shah."

This [was in] 1975. So in 1975 I thought that obviously the thing was going to crack. After all the signs were there -- failures in the public services, the public utilities, electricity failures and so on, a general discontent and, of course, appalling corruption, appalling stories of vast sums of money changing hands in commissions. And it was called "commissions on contracts".

Q: But don't you think that, also, Iranians -- It seems to me they are very sensitive to corruption and charges of corruption at the same time as being utterly corrupt. For instance, corruption -- which is called commission -- is sort of institutionalized in the West. Everybody accepts like ten percent commission or something like that. It's perfectly all right. Some people, like art dealers and --

[tape stopped in the middle of the interviewer's question]

[end of side two of tape three]

Q: Human beings being what they are, people know that there is going to be corruption and that one might as well institutionalize it and regularize it in order to curve it and limit it to certain amounts. But it seems that in Iran nobody could accept that notion.

So you were talking about corruption -- how generalized it was (as it were). Why do you suppose the Shah didn't stop it some way?

Avery: Well, give him his due. He did rile against corruption. And in contracts with foreign



firms, including the one with Molems, he insisted on a clause against corrupt practices being included. His own family, of course, were very corrupt. Eventually, he did attempt to curb their activities.

No, I think the Shah must be given his due certainly in this respect. He was (I think) himself very much opposed to corruption. He would see it (I believe) -- corruption -- as vitiating good government. And I think he was concerned to try and establish good government.

But of course, corruption was always accepted as part of life in Iran. What was troublesome was that it was becoming corruption on such a massive scale -- becoming excessive -- by everybody's standards.

Meanwhile, the boom in construction was staving off popular discontent because so many people were employed in actual building works that there was enough going on -- the discontent of the captive bay. If one stayed in hotels like the Hilton and got up in the morning and looked out of the window, you'd see numerous building sites all around and you'd see the workmen and little boys who worked as well -- villagers probably. You'd see them getting up; they slept on the site. And they worked away all day and were fed. Children (the lads) would be fetching their tea and so on -- preparing food for them. This was fine.

It was after 1973 when the recession began to set in -- 1976, 1977. And these building works began to suffer from bankruptcy and to be halted that the trouble came to a head.

Q: And at that point it probably was the wrong time to loosen the reigns (as it were) and to start liberalizing measures.

Avery: Yes. One of the troubles is that Iran -- And I would like to say straight away that when I say "Iran" in this case, one can say a good many other nations including modern Britain, for example -- lives very much in the immediate present. There are never any contingencies.

Governments lurch from one ad hoc situation to the next. There's very little forward planning, very few contingency arrangements. Planning social governments, yes. But again, never any planning for consequences -- consequences of actions. What happens when things begin to go wrong? Government on a high (so to speak) of prosperity -- huge oil revenues coming in, lots of investment, lots of building going on, everybody rushing about creating things.

What's going to happen if suddenly the oil revenues go down -- if there's a glut of oil on the world markets and people are not prepared to pay that price? Nobody seems to have any contingency plans. The Shah and his governments had no plans for what might happen if the situation begins to change.

What he began to do was somehow to think, "Oh, well, they're getting discontented because things are going wrong. So this is the moment when I'll relax the severe regime that I formerly had been maintaining."

Well, that was just to take the lid off the can of worms. [chuckles] I mean, that was to let everything loose.

Q: Yes, but of course, his hand was a bit forced by Jimmy Carter.

Avery: His hand was partly forced by Carter to a considerable degree, I believe. Carter's presence in the United States placed the world in terrible jeopardy.

Q: It's one of the biggest calamities of modern times. [chuckles]

Avery: One of the biggest calamities of modern times. I do agree with you there.

And also, I think the Shah was beginning to realize his appalling illness -- one of the best kept

secrets of modern times. And [he was] beginning to think very much in terms of the regency and thinking perhaps that he should mend fences with his subjects in order to leave a happy situation for his son. I think these were factors operating in his mind.

Then, of course, the gradual realization that it wasn't working that way and that people were beginning to show their resentment and criticism of his regime, I think completely broke him. Of course, finally, he was left a broken man. Because he had been at one period -- during the Mossadeq's regime -- I remember Sa'id Anjavi, who was running a newspaper in Mossadeq's regime, describing how he'd been sent for by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and meeting a man who had prematurely aged. He was shuffling along in carpet slippers, totally broken -- begging of Anjavi to use his newspaper in favor of the court and of the Shah, actually showing him bowls of money and saying, you know, "This is yours if you'll do this and that."

So the Shah was essentially (I think) a weak man. He could easily be broken by circumstances. And he was, of course, very badly broken by just a failure to know what to do, conflicting advice, waiting for instructions from the United States as to what best to do and getting conflicting advice from them. Because of course, there are so many United States out there. But I don't mean the [chuckles] actual states of unit; I mean governments. [chuckles] There's the Pentagon, there's the State Department and there's the White House -- not always acting in unison, in fact, very rarely (it seems to me) acting in unison. They were just setting a classic example of it -- Casper Weinberger saying one thing about New Zealand and George Shultz saying another.

Well, this was the kind of thing that Shah was confronted with.

Q: But anyway, why should he listen to them? I mean, he was a sovereign. Why should he listen to them?

The is the strength of Khomeini is that he suddenly says, "I'm not going to listen to anyone."

Avery: He had no idea what to do and no advice from anyone except that he should go on holiday. That was principal advice apparently the British and U.S. Ambassadors gave him towards the end.

Q: Only because there was no other choice.

Avery: But there was no other choice.

Gradually, Iranian people who'd been kept in a degree of suppression for what -- fifty-odd years -- saw their chance to come out and reassert themselves. That is what happened. It was very sad.

Q: Yes, but the assertion lasted a few days. Look what they're doing to them now.

Avery: Yes.

Q: I mean, it's a children's tea party compared to -- But they should know whatever the Shah may or may not have done to the people, it's absolutely nothing compared to --

Avery: Yes, it was less capriciously, less arbitrarily cruel than the present one. At least one knew that if one did certain things under the Shah's regime, certain unpleasant things were likely to happen. As in the present regime, nobody ever knows when they may be made victims. It might be the person smoking the wrong kind of cigarette [chuckles] or because you're listening to a cassette playing western music in your motorcar.



Q: Or wearing a tie.

Avery: Or wearing a tie. It really is a disaster -- the present situation. [chuckles] However --

Q: But you see, Khomeini now doesn't say, "Well, I am going to listen to anybody's advice."

You see, all Iranians (as you say) believe that it is always the hand of the foreigner. And Khomeini was catty enough to realize that it's not the hand of the foreigners -- the majority was the people themselves and that he could do what he wanted while allowing to think that it was somebody else pulling the strings.

Avery: Yes.

In the 1950s when I was living in Iran, one of my closest friends was Ehsan Naraqi -- extremely clever man.

Q: What's happened to him?

Avery: Well, he was sentenced to jail for twelve years or seven years (I'm not quite sure which). But Bani Sadr effected his release and he's all right. Bani Sadr had been a pupil of his in Paris.

Ehsan was a clever and a witty man. He and I used to discuss (in 1956, 1957) the future of Iran with extreme foreboding -- quite gloomy foreboding. [chuckles] I remember I used to say, "Well, who would take over?"