"Speaking as one member of the Prime Minister's club to another," addressing Edward Heath, "I would like to congratulate you on the way you have dealt with British industry or the economy, or something." Just that. Harold Wilson rose to his feet and walked out.

Q: Why was that?

Parsons: Because he considered, as he announced to the press afterward, that in his speech the Iranian Prime Minister had ventured onto British domestic ground.

Q: How typical of Wilson. [laughter]

Parsons: The fact that you said that, not me -- But, I mean, that's an indication, you see, of how Iranians aren't the only people who are touchy about their internal affairs. This can be true even in a country like Britain. That's a true story. Occasionally, of course, I would bring something up. But the Shah's response was such to indicate to me that I had better not go any further. I did put in the book this comment I made to him about the really dreadful atmosphere in the universities which I'd found. I'd visited all the universities in my first year because there were British teachers in all of them and I wanted to see them and talk to them and so on. And I did eventually say to the Shah, "You know, I've now visited all your universities and I'm absolutely appalled at what they're like." I said, "I've been in America at the worst

time of the Kent State riots and all that kind of thing. I've seen our universities in Britain. I've served in places like Egypt where there's always university turbulence." And I said, "I can tell you, Your Majesty, that I have never seen anything nearly as bad as the atmosphere on every single university campus in your country."

Q: What was it like?

Parsons: Well. I would not call myself a trained observer just somebody who's had some experience of visiting places in an official way where everything is always laid on for the best but you're looking for what is the reality behind it. There was an atmosphere of sullenness, of alienation, of discontent. There were --

Q: Among the undergraduates. [unclear]

Parsons: Yes, amongst the undergraduates and it was pretty clear that it extended to the younger staff too. I would always notice, for example, that if the English faculty were called together so that we could talk together about, say, the English teaching program with the British teachers there that the professor would come or somebody like that and most of the younger members of the faculty would not come. They would be very conspicuously absent. I never went to a campus where there were not Savak landrovers all over the place. You know, dotted around in the trees, and so on. You could say that you could cut the atmosphere with a blunt knife. I was very, very struck by this. But, of course, when I said this to the

Shah because I thought it was an observation which might interest him, he just said, "Well, Ambassador, this is a very tiny minority of foreign inspired agitators." So I thought that was his way of telling me to mind my own business and --

[end of side two of tape one]

Q: [unclear] -- So, we stopped at when you told me about the unrest at the universities. The Shah said that they were foreign inspired agitators and you dropped the subject.

Parsons: And there were many other things, really, as the years went on where we in the embassy thought that either things were going actively wrong or the Shah's own initiatives were clearly not working, which I could, I suppose, have talked to him about. With a close friend like Amir Abbas Hoveyda, I certainly did. We used to discuss --

Q: And didn't he pass it on?

Parson: I don't believe so. No. I don't believe so. I used to a lesser extent, but to a fair extent, with Assadolah Alam. Whether he passed it on or not, again I'm not sure. But I always hesitated to do so with the Shah, really, for two reasons. First of all, as I put in my book, I assumed with all his intelligence services that he knew all these things a damn sight better than I did so that I would not be telling him anything he didn't know, which was, of course, a

false assumption. And secondly, because it would have been breaking my rule about trying to conduct a perfectly normal relationship between two equal countries. For example, traveling around the country and just talking to people it was pretty clear to all of us outsiders within a few months that the Rastakhiz experiment was a fiasco. It was either being completely ignored or just laughed at.

Q: But I don't understand that because the Shah with his respect, and I'm sure it was genuine, for sort of Western type democracy - how could he go for a one party system which was the hallmark of Eastern block? What is the point of having a party if it's only one party?

Parsons: Well, of course, I don't know, You see. I just don't know now how much people did tell him. But the decision came as far as we the foreigners (outsiders) were concerned, completely out of the blue. I'd been actually only a few weeks before in the diplomatic gallery at the enormous IRAN NOVIN congress which was held somewhere west of Tehran. I can't remember where now. And it all seemed to be going along and there'd just been elections as far as I can remember. And then suddenly, overnight, we read in our papers that, it's all been scrapped and something new had been put in its place. Everything seemed to happen like that. I remember the shared participation decision. You remember, a kind of industrial democracy. It was just announced one day in the papers. I don't know how much prior consideration or consultation there'd been. I suspect very little. Because my closest confidant, in a way, was

Amir Abbas. We used to talk completely freely because we were such old friends. And I certainly got the impression that some of these major decisions would come as much of a surprise to him as they had to the rest of us.

Q: How did this reflect the relationship between the Shah and the masses?

Parsons: This was, I suppose, where we (the outsiders) did make a fundamental mistake. Because the Shah was always very boastful about this particularly in the presence of foreign visitors. I used to take dozens of cabinet ministers, members of the Royal Family, distinguished British people up to see him. And he often used to introduce this subject of how he had a Shah-people revolution which meant, in effect, that he had jumped over the heads of the establishment, and had created a direct link with the people themselves. In order to sustain that direct link, he, the originator of this philosophy, had to be in close day to day touch with everything that was going on in the country. And he used to go on to say that, "I have "X" number of different, independent sources of intelligence and so I am in a position to put all these together and come to my own conclusion as to what the people are really thinking." Well, I don't say that I swallowed all that. But, given the fact that his expertise on the subjects which we used to discuss - foreign affairs and strategic matters - was so great, I rather naturally assumed that he also knew what was happening in his own country a darn sight better than I did. So that if I did tell him

that in my experience after, say, a tour in northeast Iran so far as I could gather, the Rastakhiz had been a complete fiasco and nobody was interested in it, that I wouldn't actually be telling him anything he didn't know. Well this, of course, was where we were all wrong. And it wasn't really until, I suppose, 1978 that I started to realize how totally divorced he was from what was happening in his own country.

Q: So now going back to 1974, a lot of people have said and I'm sure you have read about that when he quadrupled the price of oil at the end of [nineteen] seventy-three, [nineteen] seventy-four, he in effect, signed his own death warrant in so far as the foreign countries became very angry with Iran and proceeded to destabilize the country systematically. Now we do know that destabilization can happen. We are witnessing it in certain parts of the world at the moment and have witnessed it since the war. The Russians systematically in various parts of the world. So it can happen. There is no doubt about it that the foreign press had it in for the Shah. I mean, there was not one day where there wasn't some kind of a knife put into him. Whereas, now a days there is absolutely nothing. Nobody says anything about Khomeini. Occasionally there is a caricature or something but basically people seem to have forgotten about it. So how would you explain that?

Parsons: Well, I know that this is a very commonly held view but I don't myself believe that there is an atom of truth in it. I can only speak for my own government and to some extent for other

Western governments too - because we were all comparing very closely at the end of 1973 - to start with, although the Shah was the person. It was the Iranian government, which actually made the final decision at OPEC to increase the price to eleven dollars or whatever it was. I think the general view amongst the Western governments, which I would still maintain to be the case, is that the trebling of the price was, in fact, a direct consequence of the October War of 1973 between the Arabs and the Israelis. I mean that the price was surging upwards because of the oil embargo against the United States and other countries by the Arabs which led to a shortage, which led to the stock market going through the roof. The oil prices were rising rapidly from October, 1973 through. I mean Iran took the lead at the OPEC meeting in December, 1973 to actually raise the price to the point that it reached. I think the kind of political feeling in the West was that this was really a consequence of the October War. And, if you listen to programs now on television or read the papers about that period, you very, very seldom hear or read anybody saying that the Shah raised the price in [nineteen] seventy-three. They all say the Arabs. It's not all that number of people who realize actually that that meeting was an Irananian initiative. So I don't think that the blame for that or the resentment of Western governments was directed so much against the Shah. I think it was regarded as an inevitable consequence of the October War and the use by the Arabs of the oil weapon. Now, by that same token, the Shah in fact, setting aside the question of price, you see, gained himself enormous popularity at that time in the West by the fact that he refused to use the oil weapon. He was

under great pressure from the Arabs to join the embargo against certain Western countries until Israel withdrew or whatever it might have been. But he firmly refused to use the oil weapon for political reasons. So, in fact, apart from the price question, the Shah in Western eyes came well out of that. So there was certainly no reason, in that sense, for anybody to want to destabilize the government in Iran. And, secondly, in Britain, in the United States, France we all did regard the Shah's regime as by far the best conceivable government in Iran from the point of view of the general stability of the region and also from the overall point of view of Western interests. I think we all believed that if the Shah fell that -- We didn't, I don't think, anticipate for a moment that he would be replaced by a government of religious theocrats. We would have guessed, I think, that he would have been replaced by radical, Khadafi type officers or radical left-wingers of some kind which might very well bring in the Soviet Union which might create an East-West confrontation. No. The stability of Iran under the Shah, never mind the price rise, was a very important factor for the West and I don't think there was any question about that. I don't think, Western governments, even if they had put one hundred percent blame on the Shah for the price rise, would behave like that. The reason why there was this enormous commercial drive for Western exports to Iran was twofold. Commercially it was because the contracts were lucrative. And, in another sense, there was a feeling in the West that since we were now paying three times as much for our oil as we had the day before, we must get as much of that money back as we possibly could in commercial terms. So we

really regarded Iran as a very attractive prospect once the price had been put up. And, you know, so long as Iran was stable and doing business with us the last thing we wanted to do was to disturb that. You've only got to really look at the behavior of the West in the five years, really almost until the end. All of the Western leaders were beating a very deep path to Iran. If we wished to destabilize Iran we wouldn't have had just about every single member of our Royal Family pouring out there, every single member of the cabinet, all of the leading members of the British establishment. Then the same was true in France and Germany and the United States and God knows where. No. I know that most of my Iranian friends believed this. But it really is complete rubbish.

Q: What about the relationship between the British and clergy. When did you cease that? I mean, there had always been relationship between the British and the Persian Clergy. That's another bone of contention. But why was it that it wasn't a Khadafi type colonel who took over but a Moslem fanatic?

Parsons: In the past, of course, there was a link between the British and the clergy. I think in what you might call British "imperialist" philosophy, the reason for this was that when Britain penetrated another country, whether it was in the full colonial sense like India or in the sphere of influence sense like Iran, the first thing the British always did was to seek out the traditional leaders of society and try and form a relationship with them. So, it was natural going back to the nineteenth and early twentieth

century that the British should have formed a link with the clergy. It is my own experience that nineteen fifty-one to [nineteen] fifty-three was a watershed, in our terms, in our relationship with Iran. I'm not for a moment trying to deny that we were messing about in Iran's internal affairs before then. I'm going right back perhaps to Fathali Shah [19th Century Qajar Shah of Iran]. But really that was a watershed, that breach. I was actually on the Persian desk for about a year, in Eastern Department in the Foreign Office at that time when I came home from Bagdad, through [nineteen] fifty-four. And we really did make a conscious decision even as early as that that we must make a fresh start. I can't swear to whether Roger Stevens or the earlier ambassadors after that time had any relationship with the clergy. But I know, as well as I know my own name, that certainly in Dennis Wright's time and Peter Ramsbottom's time and in my time, there was absolutely no relationship between the British and the clergy whatsoever. I never even --

Q: So the Khomeini phenomenon is a sort of suigeneric. It's --

Parsons: Well, I -- It certainly owed nothing to us. I remember, I think -- I put this in the book, that in September of 1978 the Shah said to me, "Could I do anything to get the clergy in Qum, not Khomeini but Shariatmadari [a grand Ayatollah, rival to Khomeini] and people like that "to cool it down a bit." And I remember losing my temper with him and saying, "because of your suspicions of us neither me, nor any of my predecessors for years had even shaken the

hand of a mullah. We don't even know them by sight, let alone to speak to. And now you ask me to go and get them to cool it. Well, then that's just nonsense." No. I mean, I know none of my Iranian friends believe me that there was absolutely no foreign hand behind those events. I'm not saying that the behavior of foreign powers didn't influence events. There's no doubt that Carter's general attitude to human rights as expressed from Washington had it's impact both on the Shah and on the opposition. The Shah was worried. The opposition took heart. No question about that. But that I don't call, you know, the hidden hand. It wasn't deliberate because it was a global policy. He was having the same effect on Latin American countries and people whom he was criticizing. I believe -- I still do right to this day - that the causes of the revolution were Iranian causes, that it was basically a quarrel between Iranians and Iranians and there was no foreign interference. Indeed, even if there had been, foreigners could have done nothing about it. Even the Soviet Union -- I'm not saying that maybe if somebody came along to the Russian Embassy and said, "Look, can I have a thousand dollars so that I can set up a printing press and produce anti-Shah pamphlets," that they didn't give it to him; subversion of a low level kind like that. But I don't believe that they, for example, were trying to destabilize the Shah. I think they --

Q: Where did the money come from?

Parsons: The bazaar.

Q: The bazaar?

Parsons: I think so. I very much doubt if there was any outside money. You know how much money there is in the bazaar. An infinite amount. And I think it was -- I still believe what I wrote in my book, that essentially it was a symbiotic relationship between the bazaar and the clerical religious parties which formed the basic engine of the revolution. And that the intellectual opposition, the modern opposition whether it was radical left with Majahedin or National Front, was simply riding on the top of this engine. This was the heart of the thing, the backbone of Iran, the artisan class, the Bazaar, and the religious class. In fact, really what had happened was that we outsiders all thought that the Pahlani revolution had actually transformed the country into something different and we found out at the end that it had not. It had only scratched the surface. We were really dealing with the Iran of 1906 or 1892. That actual political configuration of the country had not changed.

Q: And that it was really a counter revolution? Right?

Parsons: I believe so. Yes. The method was the same, the national strike, all that kind of thing, withdrawal, civil disobedience, and so forth, rioting followed by civil disobedience. Exactly the same as happened during the Tohacco revolution. Well, of course, I suppose if you really look at the -- There's a mathematical thing, isn't there, in physics that each action produces an equal and

opposite reaction. I suppose the Shah did ascend a pinnacle of supreme one man rule. Perhaps to a greater extent, as far as the country as a whole is concerned, than anybody had in Iran, I mean, since say Shah Abbas [Safavid King, 16-17 Century]. Most Shahs through Qajar times and later in Pahlani times have shared power, have had to maneuver to balance various elements of power, the Bazaar, the religious parties, the intellectuals of the time, the military, et cetera, et cetera. So they were, more or less, rather like medieval kings in England. They were part of the power struggles themselves and they were only reaching supremacy by allying themselves with one group against another group and forming different patterns of alliance. The Shah, because Reza Shah never really had the time, eventually became totally supreme, it seemed over everybody. He didn't have to accommodate this group or that group. He was the supreme power. This was really a rather unique phenomenon, I think in Iran. And it produced an equally violent reaction, a more total collapse, fundamental collapse than would have been the case if he'd been, say, the Shah of the nineteen fifties when he was to some extent sharing power with other elements.

Q: So, yes. You say you couldn't do anything about it and you don't think that your sort of observations filtered through Hoveyda to the Shah?

Parsons: No. I don't think so. I don't think so. I remember the last time I saw Hoveyda face to face as opposed to on the telephone

was in, I think, October of [nineteen] seventy-eight when he was out of office. He'd been the Shah's prime minister for thirteen years. He was alleged to be very close to the Empress. I went to see him in his modest little house in Shemiran and we talked for a couple of hours about the Crisis. And he had many ideas, you know, as to how the Shah might be able to resolve it. And we talked for a long time. And I said, "Look, Amir Abbas, I take it you're getting all this through to the Shah, all the things you've been saying to me." And he said, "No. I have no way." I said, "Contact with the Empress or something?" He said, "No, No. I have no way." He said, "If you --" He said, "I know he's seeing you the whole time, Tony." He said, "If you can get across some of the things I'm saying, well please do." "Because" he said, "I have no way of doing it." And I don't think he ever really did. I mean, I think he saw the Shah at the Cabinet meetings and meetings of the Higher Economic Council and all that kind of thing. But I very much doubt even now, looking back on it, whether he ever had sat down alone in the Shah's study like Asadollah Alam [the late Shah's Minister of Court and personal friend] and they just kind of chatted for an hour or so. I don't think he ever had that kind of relationship. I may be wrong but I always got that impression.

Q: So. In that case it would have been better to try and filter things through Asadollah Alam, No?

Parsons: Well, to some extent of course, I used to. And, of course, Asadollah Alam did have this relationship. This is a story

not about domestic affairs but it's an illustration of his influence. I've not told this story in my book and I don't think I've ever told it before and if these go into this archive, someday somebody may come upon this. When he was dying -- this must have been in late seventy-seven, and he was a dying man. He was in his house. He wasn't going to the office. He looked like a skeleton. I got a telegram from the Foreign Office one day saying that an Iranian military aircraft had been shot down by the South Yemen forces on the border between Dhofar and South Yemen and the aircraft had come down into the sea about a hundred yards offshore. It was still visible, actually. The water is very shallow. The Foreign Office got information that the Iranian Navy had sent a task force there and they were going to do a frogman operation to recover the aircraft. Well, the aircraft was not a particularly modern aircraft. There was no point, from the intelligence point of view, in recovering it. It was a standard American airplane of some kind or another. The war had ended in Dhofar. There was peace. It was quite clear to the Foreign Office that if there was an Iranian military operation like this, it could reignite the whole war down there and there was actually no purpose in it. So I was instructed to do whatever I could to prevent this from happening. Late in the afternoon. I thought of going to see the Shah but then I thought that if I did, and tried to persuade him to call this operation off, he would just think this was cowardice on the British part and would get on his high horse and would take no notice. So I decided to go to see Asadollah Alam. I rang him up and went and called on him at his house. He greeted me in a kind of black Aba, looking absolutely

like a skeleton, you know. Yellow in the face and really he'd been off duty for a long time. He didn't even know this incident had happened. He was completely out of touch with everything. He was just sitting in his house, effectively dying. I explained the whole thing to him. I said, "Look, we're not giving this advice out of cowardice or anything of that kind but simply because we think that if this happens it's not going to gain Iran anything to get this broken up airplane back and it could have a very disastrous effect on stability in that particular area." And, "Can you do something?" In fact there was a prestige element in the task forces, since it was under the command of Prince Shafiq [Princess Ashraf's second son, murdered by Khomeini's terrorists]. Shahriar.

Q: Shahriar. That's right.

Parsons: Well Alam said, "You know, I'll do what I can. Go back to your embassy . I'll ring you in an hour's time." Well, he rang me in an hour's time and said, "It's O.K., the whole thing's been called off and they're on the way back to Bandar Abbas. Finished." Well, now there's nobody else in the country who could have achieved that. This was a measure, even as a dying man, of his intimacy, his confidential relationship with the Shah. As I've said in the book -- I think it was a kind of Greek tragedy for the Shah, a kind of inevitability of history perhaps, that Asadollah effectively died and actually died just at the time when the Shah most needed advice. Because I don't think anybody else was in that position, certainly not Amir Abbas.

Q: What about the Queen?

Parsons: I just don't know. I never did know, really. I never had any idea of the extent to which she actually discussed politics with him. She had a whole range of social affairs and charitable affairs and educational affairs and cultural affairs and all that kind of thing. Yes, I think she had an enormous influence. But I just simply never knew how much she was part of the political act. Some people said she was very involved. That she was, in fact, partly behind Rastakhiz. It was a lot of her kind of clever young men who thought it all up. I've heard that. But I've heard exactly the opposite. That they didn't feel a need to discuss this kind of political matter. I just don't know.

Q: It's just that she's very intelligent. And, also, she's very politically aware. You see what I mean. She really has a very good political vein. I mean, she understands things very well when you talk to her. So maybe they had an arrangement whereby she would look after certain areas and wouldn't talk about anything else or indeed she would be too busy to talk about anything else. But it seems to me that she was. Indeed, she told me that they talked quite freely with each other without advising him or anything like that but they would have intelligent conversations on equal terms. And I would have thought that maybe one could filter through something through her. I don't know.

[end of side one of tape two]

Parsons: I used to see her quite frequently. But, I always saw her on business connected with her own kind of area. You remember, we arranged an enormous British cultural festival in [nineteen] seventy-seven. It seems ironic now. Biggest thing we've ever mounted in any overseas country ever. And I had a lot to do with her over various things like, you know, the publication of books, the Cambridge history of Iran, a lot of things of that kind. But I don't think I ever really had a serious political conversation with her. Not that I can think of. I really don't know. I just don't know what her relationship was in that sense. Certainly people used to say that there were only two people in the country who could really talk openly to the Shah, one was Asadollah Alam and the other was her. Maybe that -- I also thought, towards the end, that the same might have been true of Manouchehr Eqbal [Prime Minister and head of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)]. But he also, of course, died at the wrong time. Of course that was one of the things I remember which struck me most forcefully when I got used to the country, when I'd been there a bit, was how, by really not destroying but by neutralizing the traditional political establishment of the country - landlords, Bazarris - people like that, religious leaders, how totally unpolitical the whole set up seemed to me to be. There was the Shah and then there were a group of people who in British terms would have been regarded as permanent officials not politicians (Amir Abbas and the whole cabinet). Some of them were men of brilliant intellect and great ability and

devotion to their work. The one thing I always noticed about them, talking to them, was that none of them had any political constituency in the country at all. Most of them had spent more of their lives abroad than they had in Iran. Somebody like Fereydoon Mahdavi for example and what was the other man's name? The Minister of Industry; a very clever man. Often we used to joke about it in the Embassy that most of the Cabinet ministers knew more about the political situation in Britain than they did about the political situation in Iran. They were greater experts on the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party in Britain probably than we were. And, you know, really didn't seem to be even interested in the politics of their country. It seemed to be a kind of non-political scene. The impression I got was that the only old fashioned political figure with an old fashioned feel for the country, who was in direct contact with the Shah, was Alam who had very deep roots in a certain part of Iran and was really part of an older establishment than all these technocratic ministers who comprised the Cabinet.

Q: Of course they're -- Probably the argument behind his stance was that if Iran was becoming a modern country, it needed the young blood and you needed the new educated people. And that the old guard had to gradually, you know --

Parsons: Yes, I think this was his philosophy. Of course it was compounded by the emasculation of the Parliament. If the Parliament had been able -- The Parliament after all did contain people with

constituencies of a kind. I mean, local people who had some roots in the constituencies and so on. Even though they may have been carefully selected, I mean, they must have known a great deal more of what was going on than these technocratic ministers did. If they'd been free without actually blocking the Shah's policy to express their views and if some of the senior ones had had access to the Shah he might have got a better feel for conditions through them. But I think it was understandable. If you were trying to, say, to transform the whole system of distribution of goods within the country, it was better to have somebody in charge of that who really knew his stuff than some political figure. All that was reasonable enough. But really except for Alam -- I remember thinking this at a very early stage -- There was absolutely nobody from the old establishment who seemed to me to have any voice in affairs at all. Hoveyda himself, of course, was the nearest to that because he did get around and see people and all the rest of it. But I don't think he had the access to the Shah.

Q: And some people say that he survived simply because he never rocked the boat.

Parsons: I think his philosophy as stated to me on many occasions was, "There are a lot of things about the way the country is run that I don't like but I can't think of a better regime than we've got now and, therefore, it is my duty to make it work as best I can." Which, of course, in our British terms is really the attitude of an official and not of a politician. I mean, as a life long

official my duty - so long as there isn't a policy which is so repugnant to me that I resign - is to argue my case, accept the decision that the politicians make and then try and carry it out in the best possible way. That to me is the duty of an official. And that I think is how all these cabinet ministers including Hoveyda conceived their duties. Not to get involved in the actual politics of the whole thing.

Q: I guess that made the Shah very lonely at times.

Parsons: I think it did. I think it did make him very lonely. For example one of the things I quote in the book was when the Shah suddenly decided that the whole bread manufacture and distribution system in the country should be transformed from its traditional condition into kind of "Mother's Pride" sliced bread a la Europe or America. I don't suppose that Fereydoon Mahdavi, who was responsible for this, found himself in a position to explain the politics of this to the Shah in terms of the country. He just went away and did his best to make it work. Whereas, in our system, the politicians would have argued amongst themselves as to whether this was going to fly in terms of public opinion and pressure groups. If they decided that it was, then the officials would have been told to go on and do it. If they decided that it was not, it wouldn't have been attempted. Well, I don't think that process ever happened.

Q: What about the left wing opposition forces -- did they have any effect?

Parsons: In spite of the occasional terrorism and that kind of thing, I don't think we, the Western diplomats -- I mean not just us, the British, but when we discussed it with each other, I don't think we really ever thought that the Tudeh Party was a serious threat to actually take over the country. We saw it as being strong in certain areas, non-existent in others, fairly weak in others, but it didn't have a kind of national presence which would have been able to take over. And we always thought there was far too much emphasis being put on really paper tigers.

Q: And nobody told him this?

Parsons: So it seems.

Q: I mean, it's very sad of course but there you are. Did you have any idea that the Shah was ill?

Parsons: No. We picked up, as everybody did, the rumors that used to circulate just about every year. You know, about visits to Vienna and doctors being flown in and all the rest of it. And I always used to take these very seriously and I used to investigate them and I used to report about them and so on. But so far as I was concerned, I could only deal with what I could see and, on the face of it -- The Shah, who was roughly my age, two or three years older perhaps, - always seemed to me to be a man in very good physical shape. He rode a lot. He skied a lot. He played tennis a

lot. He looked well. He had a good color. He wasn't losing weight. All the classical symptoms to a layman of somebody who is ill were not present. And I always used to discount these stories. And, I do believe that morale has a trememdous effect on physical illness. If the revolution had not happened -- If everything was still going fine in Iran, I guess the Shah would probably still be alive. He might have had a very long term kind of wasting illness. Many people have that. But I think it was precipitated by the collapse. I don't really believe, although an awful lot of my friends would contradict this, that it was actually a serious factor in the revolution. Certainly, as far as I was concerned - right up to the very end he seemed to me to be wholly lucid and in control of himself and not really showing any signs of this physical malaise. I know other people did see him not in that condition. Only on one occasion did he seem to me to be ill.

Q: When was that?

Parsons: In September. I remember going to see him one day. He looked awful and couldn't concentrate and he looked yellow and so I thought, "My God, there's something terrible wrong with that fellow." But I saw him again, thirty-six hours later, and he was absolutely O.K.

Q: Well, of course, this is one of the mysteries that one doesn't know about cancer. What effect it has on the general --

Parsons: Yes on the personality.

Q: Personality.

Parsons: Yes. I quite agree. I quite agree. But certainly, strange though it may seem, I don't think any of us - the Americans, ourselves, the leading foreign countries -- I don't think any of us really knew that he was as ill as he ultimately, obviously was.

Q: I wonder when you say you investigated the rumors about him being ill and doctors coming over and so on. How did you do that and what was the --

Parsons: Well. I would ask around of people who might know. I would say quite openly to the people at the court, "You know, I hear that your Shah's gone off for medical treatment to Vienna. Is there something wrong? And they would discuss it openly. But they would say he was having a check up or he had something minor. Well he did have his back trouble, you see, the whole time. When you were sitting talking to him he was always moving about in his chair. You know, like this. He was kind of uncomfortable. He had this back trouble which lots of people do, of course. Things like that. And, if I may say so without giving offense, I think Iranians are hypochondriacs - I mean very much obsessed with their health. They're always having check ups every five minutes and that kind of thing. And I don't think I've ever had a check up in my life. [chuckle] And it wasn't surprising that he should be going to see

doctors and the doctors should be coming to see him and that kind of thing. It didn't seem to be a remarkable phenomenon. And then, you see, I saw him so relatively frequently -- I used to ski a lot at Dizin and he was often there, you know, skiing away like mad.

Q: I wonder whether he was told the truth.

Parsons: Ah. Indeed, of course, that point does --

Q: Because, you see, the behavior towards the very end, I think, gives me the idea that maybe he didn't know completely what the truth was. Because if you have cancer in the lymphatic glands, like having it in the blood, it just goes 'round your body. I mean you can protract the decay but you can't really stop it. So if you knew that was the case, maybe he would have said, "Well, what have I got to lose? I'm going to stick it out and see what they do to me or what will happen." And instead of saying, "Well, I'll leave and see what they do." I wonder whether they didn't until the last minute as they got so used to hiding the truth.

Parsons: This is a speculation, of course. But if he'd really known that he was dying in the time scale that eventually turned out to be the case and if he'd really believed, in his own mind, that his own judgement and his personality was being impaired by his illness, I would have thought the obvious thing to have done - which might of course even have defused the revolution would have been to have abdicated, say, in the summer of 1978, and in favor of his son,

to create a completely new atmosphere in the country and maybe that would have defused it. I don't think he would have hesitated to do that simply because he wanted to cling to power. I think he was a patriotic man. But in all the conversations I had with him, you know, right up to the bitter end, nothing like this was ever mentioned.

[interruption in tape]

Q: This is the second session with Sir Anthony Parsons. We just carry on from where we left it last time. Today is the seventh of March, 1985. Now this is our second session and I have got a few extra questions, you know, carrying on from where you were last time. One of them is that, obviously, you had lots of friends in Persia. You were very popular. And you reciprocated. I mean, there were a lot of friends that you liked there and you generally had great sympathy for the country. But did this sympathy extend to the political set up and to the regime and to the court? Because, apparently, some Iranians thought that you were rather critical of the system and particularly Lady Parsons was rather critical of the system?

Parsons: Well. I suppose it is true to say that, having spent a great deal of time in the Arab world where whatever the failings of government may be, the general atmosphere is very cozy to use a particularly English expression; I think I did find the court very protocolaire, rather stiff and remote from the people as a whole.

This doesn't mean I didn't have many close friends in the court. But the general atmosphere of the court I found unfamiliar in my experience. The system itself -- I was enormously impressed with the majority of the people who were operating the political system. My main criticism of it was that it seemed to me, right from the moment I arrived, that it was too technocratic and not political enough. That is to say that very few of the ministers seemed to me to have any political constituency or real understanding of what was going on at the grass roots of the country. They were enormous experts on their own subjects, whatever they might have been. But they were acting as if they were operating their system in Western Europe or the United States and they didn't seem to have a kind of grass roots feel for their own people. That was my criticism of the system.

Q: Yes. Of the people generally. I mean, what you really are saying is what a lot of people were saying that there was sort of tremendous class division. Those who were educated and they had a kind of disrespect, almost, for their own people.

Parsons: Yes. A lack of understanding, in a sense. I've been used to politicians in my own country and, indeed, politicians in other countries I have served in who may not have been great intellectual giants, may not have been particularly expert on their own portfolios if they were technical ones, but they had officials to supply that need and their task was to know what actually would fly with the people and what wouldn't fly. They were totally in touch

with the people. And although something might seem theoretically a marvelous idea, they had this link with their own people which made them know whether or not this would actually be acceptable. Whether it would make things worse or whether it would make things better in the general political sense. This element I found lacking. It seemed to me that the Shah and the cabinet were running the state rather like a large corporation with a limited number of shareholders regardless of the masses as a whole.

Q: Yes. But what you're saying really is the fundamental question of democracy. 'Cause in a democracy, politicians have to be answerable to the people. Otherwise they don't get re-elected.

Parsons: Not entirely. For example, in Iraq under the monarchy where I was thirty odd years ago, you couldn't have called it a democracy although the country went through forms of democracy. There were elections and so on. But they were hopelessly rigged and it was just an interchange of jobs amongst a small group of insiders. Yet that group of insiders comprised people who had roots deep in the population. I mean, tribal grandees and provincial landowners and people like that who, although their views might have been just misguided, were part of their own constituencies. They had a feel for their people, even though there was no genuine democracy in the sense that we understand it in this country. If you take a more traditional Arab society, you know, like say the small states of the Persian Gulf. There isn't democracy there in the sense that the government can be thrown out. No, but the rulers

are in very close day to day touch with the people as a whole. Anybody can go and see the sheikh in a small society like Bahrain where I was for many years. It was this element that I found lacking. The government seemed to be operating, as it were, in a kind of -- Only, it was not exactly in a vacuum because it had its own constituency amongst the highly educated and richer classes. It seemed to me to be cut off from the people as a whole and, therefore, a lot of the measures that they were adopting, although theoretically excellent in terms of kind of MIT models, as it were, were totally alien, totally unacceptable to the people as a whole. That was my criticism of the system, more than the fact that it wasn't actually a kind of model democracy on Westminster lines. Iran is Iran and England is England.

Q: That's right. Yes. Because democracy on Westminster lines is the fact that Ministers are chosen to mind the MP's. So they have to have the constituency --

Parsons: Yes. I think that's quite right. I mean -- You see, in England now, for example, I suppose even the Prime Minister spends at least half a day every week in her own Parlimentary constituency, actually keeping in touch with the people who elected her. Even in her position it's very important that she does that. This keeps her in touch with the people at a mass level. The people who are interested in politics. This seemed to me to be totally lacking in Iran. And then the court, as I've said, seemed to me even more

remote. It was a kind of glittering affair which didn't really seem to me to be a part of the Iranian scene.

Q: Yes. How is it the rumor gets around that Lady Parsons is rather critical?

Parsons: I don't know. My wife is really outspoken, perhaps more so than I am. And I think she did find it and I think we both found the court -- Oh, I can't quite think of exactly the right word. I mean very stiff, very protocolaire. Very hierarchial. Everybody seemed to be afraid of the person immediately above them and rather tough with the person immediately below them. It wasn't very attractive in that sense. It wasn't a very congenial atmosphere.

Q: Did Lady Parsons have friends among Persian women?

Parsons: Oh, Lord yes! Masses. Masses. She had lots and lots of friends. And, indeed, amongst a lot of the ladies, the wives and people at the court. It was really the structure as a whole. We had great friends in the court. And we used --

Q: For instance.

Parsons: Well the -- Oh dear, his name's gone out of my head. He was the Vice Minister of the court. Oh dear.

Q: What period? They can find --