

BOOK REVIEW

Solmaz Tohidi-Rustamova. Comintern's Eastern Policy and Iran, 1919-1943. In Azeri. Khazar University Press, Baku, 2001.

Reviewed by

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I have been asked to write an evaluation of an important work in the field of modern history. I am pleased to do it.

This full length book entitled, *Kominternin Sherg Siyaseti ve Iran, 1919-1943*, Xazar Universitesi Nashriyyati, Baki, 2001, has been written by Solmaz Tohidi-Rustamova, an accomplished and known historian, who in this monograph made extensive use of recent accessibility of the archival material from the Soviet period. The general historical background of the period marked by the post World War I condition as well as the Russian revolution is provided in first part of the book devoted to the formation of the Third or Communist International known by the acronym of Comintern. More detailed discussion follows in the next part dealing with the 1920 Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, the topic on which the author had has to her credit another publication. The main underlying issue of the Congress was how to square the Western revolutionary ideas of proletarian internationalism with the aspirations of the peoples of the East, where industrial proletariat hardly existed, but the colonial rule was the norm. The native reply to the existing condition was the rise of the national movements, the potential, if not quite comfortable ally of communism in the struggle against Western imperialism. Hence came the significant modification of the slogan, "Proletarians of all countries unite", into "Proletarians of all countries and all oppressed peoples of the world unite", put forward in the Baku Congress by Zinovyev. Although as many as 45 national or ethnic groups were represented among more than two thousand participants in the Congress, the book

emphasizes the significance of the three: Turks, Iranians, and Armenians, all of them not only close neighbors of Russia, but in the case of Armenians and Turks locked in a bitter, and fresh antagonism. In the Baku debates the dominant note was the issue of the ongoing Turkish national revolution, and there resounded echoes of rivalry between the movement of Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the Young Turks represented by their exiled leader, Enver Pasha, who came to the Congress, but was not invited to address the audience. Despite the fact that Iranian delegates formed the second largest group in the Congress, the Iran question appeared as secondary in comparison to that of Turkey.

The reason for the subdued Iranian presence in the Baku Congress becomes clearer in the Chapter III of the book in which Iran comes into the focus with the extensive discussion of the problem of the revolutionary upheaval in the province of Gilan. Well before the opening of the Congress, the local Bolshevik party leaders set up in Baku a special Iranian Bureau with the aim to coordinate and direct the Soviet activities in Gilan, and these included dispatching a naval force and armed detachments. As Rustamova-Tohidi makes it clear, in the complex revolutionary environment of this region, the Soviet Russian presence was meeting with mixed acceptance. Throughout the book, the use of sources reflects the structure of the contents. The first chapters dealing with issues of more general nature, the rise of the Comintern and the Baku Congress, make use of general, published, even if not always easily accessible material. By contrast, in the chapter dealing with the revolution in Gilan, the use of archival sources comes into prominence, sometimes seems overwhelming.

The book covers the period of 24 years, of which the short-lived Gilan revolution occupies the longest part. The reason is not only the abundance of primary sources, but also the fact that at that juncture the Comintern's involvement in Iranian affairs was especially active. This is the most valuable, revealing section of the work, at the same time the longest chapter even though it covers only two years. The remaining

sections of the book, devoted to the long stretch of time from 1922 to 1943, offers less detailed treatment based more on secondary rather than primary sources.

The Soviet foreign policy drifted away from the support of the Gilan revolution toward an accommodation of the emerging regime of Reza Khan. The shift in the eyes of Iranian revolutionaries, divided as they were, could not be seen as anything but betrayal. As for the Comintern, its attention turned toward what appeared to be a more rewarding prospect than in the countries of the Middle East – the growing revolutionary potential in China. The author emphasizes that with Stalin establishing firmly his power by the late 1920's, the Comintern's activities became subordinated to the Soviet state's foreign policy. Meanwhile in Iran, the Communist movement, which increasingly veered from the national liberation mode toward the emphasis on the class warfare, fell in the decade of 1930's into almost total decline – its activists imprisoned or driven into exile by the Reza Shah's regime. Quite naturally, a major center of Iranian political emigration was the USSR, especially Soviet Azerbaijan. Yet here, many of the exiles were to experience the fate worse than what would have been in store for them under Reza Shah. The book brings in figures and some archival details on the death sentences and imprisonment Iranian Communists residing on the Soviet territory under the Stalin purges. Their fate was exemplified by the ordeal of Ehsanulla Khan.

The issue of Iranian Azerbaijan is inescapable in the discussion of Iranian revolutionary upheavals, and the book devotes to it sufficient attention. A section of Chapter III deals with the Khiabani uprising of 1920, discussing it in the background of the Gilan revolution from which the Tabriz autonomous government chose to distance itself. World War II bringing the end to the oppressive policies of Reza Shah, saw the revival of the far Left in Iran although no longer in the Communist form, but rather of the radical-populist Tudeh party variety. Again Azerbaijan showed its particularism, with the reawakening of autonomist movement under the protective umbrella of the wartime

Soviet military occupation. The thorough discussion of this movement, its differences with the Tude party, the proclamation in late 1945 of the autonomous government of Azerbaijan under Mir Jafar Pishevari was included in the Conclusions of the book, as the events continued for almost three years after the dissolution of the Comintern. The evaluation of the Comintern role with regard to Iran, sounds some negative tones as the Rustamova-Tohidi reminds that there were “neither historic-political nor economic-cultural-ideological grounds for Communism as a social system to establish itself in Iranian society”. Nonetheless, the Comintern contributed to awakening of the Asiatic peoples consciousness of defending interest of the working masses.

In her methodological approach the author shows not only a good knowledge but also the influence of Marxist thought to an extent that some passages would be difficult to follow for a Western contemporary- minded reader shaped in the post-modern schools of historical interpretations. Nonetheless, the author’s Marxist frame of mind differs from the standpoint of orthodoxy.

The axis of the book is the complex relationship between class struggle and the national liberation, with the particularity of the Middle Eastern civilization in the background. Besides showing the complexity of the national question in the imperialism-dominated East; at the same time, it indicates the controversial role of the Russian Bolsheviks, who led the struggle against Western imperialism, and themselves slipping into neo-imperialist frame of mind. As early as in the time of the Baku Congress they clearly assumed gradual inclusion of South Caucasus into the Soviet Russia, the former empire. After the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, the fate of the rest of the region appeared as a foregone conclusion. Yet, the book quotes also the delegate from Turkestan to the Congress who voiced apprehensions of new type of imperialism and called for saving the native culture, traditions and customs, as well as the region-based civilization. The growing perception was that the revolutionary Soviet State turned itself into another form of the Russian dominated empire.

The book sheds additional light at the Soviet leaders, vilified under Stalinism – Zinovyev, Radek, Bela Kun. Sultan Galiyev, who appear as the eloquent spokesmen for the national liberation struggle of the Eastern peoples against the capitalist West. The Author draws attention to the role of Soviet scholars, specialists in Iranian studies, who were instrumental in shaping the policies toward Iran in the 1920's.

The source base of the book is impressive. Apart from the primary sources from such depositories as the Azerbaijani state archives, and Russian archives of new history, which provide the solid foundation for this work, extensive contains positions in several in several languages, including numerous in Persian. The only suggestion for an addition is the recently published monograph by Cosroe Chaqueiry, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-1921. Birth of the Trauma*, Pittsburgh University Press, 1995. The index of names would be very useful - its lack causes an inconvenience for a reader, who most likely would be an academician. The book has been printed in the Azeri- Cyrillic characters, which are slowly phased out in Azerbaijan. Considering the high quality of this work, it would be regrettable to see its diminishing accessibility to readers. Hopefully, a new edition will be published in the Latin alphabet.

“КОМИНТЕРНИН ШЯРГ СИЙАСЯТИ ВЯ ИРАН, 1919-1943”.

КІТАБІНА РЯЙ

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Мяндян мцасир тарихя даир мцщцм бир иш щаггында ряй йазмаы хащиш етдибяр. Мян буну мямнунийятля едирям.

2001-ъи ил Хязяр Университясинин няшрийатында чап олунмуш адлы бу китаб йахшы танынмыш тарихчи Солмаз Тошиди-Рцстямова тяряфиндян йазылмышды. Мцяллиф бу ясяриндя сон заманлар истифадяси мцмкцн олмуш (совет дюрцндян бяри) архив материалларындан эениш истифадя етмишди.

Китабын биринъи щиссяси Ы Дцнйа Мцщарибясиндян сонракы, о тцмлядян Рус ингилабы дюрцнц ящатя едир. Икинъи щиссядя Шярг халгларынын 1920-ъи илдя кечирилмиш Бакы Конгреси щаггында мцфяссал данышылмышды. Конгресдя мцзакиря олунан мцщцм мясялялярдя бири пролетариат интернационалынын Гярб ингилаб идеясыны неъя Шярг халгларына чатдырмаг олмушдур. Бея ки, бурада мцстямлякя гайдалары нормал олдуъу щалда фящля синфи демяк олар ки, йох иди. Мювъуд шяраитдя атылан ян йахшы аддым халгы айаъа галдырмаг олду. Бурада “Бцтцн юкялярин пролетарлары бирляшин” щцары “Бцтцн юкялярин пролетарлары вя бцтцн дцнйанын язилян халглары бирляшин” щцарына кечди. Конгресдя 45 юкянин ики миндя артыг нцмайяндясинин иштирак етмясиня бахмайараг, мцяллиф ясаян цч халгдан даща ящатяли бящс едир: тцркляр, иранлылар, азярбайъанлылар. Тякъя она эюря йох ки, онларын щамысы Русийанын гоншуларыдыр, щям дя ермяниляр вя тцркляр арасында кяскин мцнагишяйя эюря. Бакы мцбащисяляриня ясас сябяб Тцрк ингилабы олмушду. Иранлылар

конгресдя чохлуг тяшкыл етселяр дя, тцрклярля баълы мяссялялярин мцзакиряси нисбятян чох йер тутурду.

Китабда гыса юмцрлц Эилан ингилабындан да ящатяли бящс едилмишди.

Мцяллиф вурьулайыр ки, Сталин эцълц дювлят йаратдыгдан сонра Коминтернин фяаллары бу дювлятин хариъи сийасятиндя асылы олдулар. Ирандакы коммунист щяракаты азадлыг мцбаризясиндя вятяндаш мцщарибясиня кечди. Коминтернин фяаллары 1930-ъу иллярдя Рза Шащын тягибиня мяруз галараг щябс вя сцрэцн олундулар. Сийаси мцщаъирлярин буюцк щиссяси Совет Иттифагына, хцсусия дя Азярбайъана сыъындылар. Китаб архив материалларына яасланараг иранлы сийаси мцщаъирлярин Сталин репресийасы дюврцндя щансы мяшыггятляря мяруз галдыындан бящс едир.

Ясярин ана хятти синфи мцбаризя иля милли-азадлыг щярякаты арасындакы мцряккяб ялагядян ибарятдир. Бунунла йанашы мцяллиф империализмин кюк салдыы Шяргдя милли мяссялялярин щяллинин мцряккяблийини эюстярмишди. Ейни заманда бу щадисялярдя рус болшевикляринин мцбащисяли хидмятлярини, онларын Гярб империалистляриня гаршы мцбаризядя апарыъы ролларыны йада салыр. Бакы конгресиндя Гафгаз республикаларынын тядриъян Совет Русийасына, кечмиш империйайа бирляшдирилмяси ниййяти ачыг-ашкар эюрцндц. Охуъу Тцркмянистандан олан конгрес нцмайяндясинин йени нюв империйанын йаранмасы тящлцкъси иля баълы хябярдарлыы иля дя таныш олур. О халглары юз мяданиййятлярини, адят вя янянялярини, о ъцмлядян резионал сивилизасийаларыны сахламаъа чаъырмышды.

Мцяллифин истифадя етдийи библиография олдугъа зянэиндир.