WHITE REVOLUTION

In January 1963 Iranian nation endorsed the six-point reforms charter which the Shah of Iran put before his nation which has since come to be known as the charter of the White Revolution. The six-point programme consisted of:

1. Land Reform, and the abolition of peasant landlord tenure system, and the redistribution and sale to their former peasants (on easy terms) of all handed estates in excess of one village.

2. The public ownership of all forest lands of the nation for the purpose of conservation, proper management and better utilization of their resources.

3. The public sale of state-owned industrial enterprises to private corporations and individuals to raise funds to finance agrarian reconstructions and development programmes, creating profitable investment opportunities for former landlords in

1. Z.N. Cavidian Iran in the service of world peace, Tehran, 1971 pp. 61 - 62
particular and for small savers in general.

4. Incentives for increased labour-productivity by means of profit sharing arrangements between industrial workers and management to the extent of 20 percent of net corporate earnings.

5. The amendment of the electoral laws so as to grant voting and other related rights to women, extending equal and universal suffrage to all Iranian citizens regardless of sex.

6. The formation of the Education Corps from high school graduate conscripts to act as primary school teachers and multi-purpose village level workers in rural areas, combating illiteracy, superstitions and ignorance.

It was subsequently realized that if the reform measures were to be all-embracing and introduce radical changes in the living conditions of the masses, other reform-measures had to supplement the initial six points of the charter. The Shah, therefore, proclaimed six other points which consisted of 1.

1. Ibid p. 62.
7. The formation of Health Corps from physicians and dentists and health personnel to bring free medical attention to rural areas, improving sanitary conditions and public health standards.

8. The formation of the Development and Agricultural Extension Corps to modernize the physical structure of the village and help farmers acquire new skills necessary to raise farm productivity.

9. The establishment of village courts to hear minor local cases so that they may be settled pragmatically, equitably and speedily bringing the rule of enlightened modern law to the village.

10. Nationalization of the country's water resources for the purpose of conservation of fresh water supplies through modern scientific practices, assuring judicious use of water in agriculture.

11. An extensive reconstruction programme in urban and rural areas to improve living standards of the whole nation.

12. A complete administrative and educational reorga-
The Shah unveiled a revolutionary front still at a great risk to his personal position and successfully put to the Iranian people in a referendum his own reform programme within the framework of what is called White Revolution designed to appeal to and benefit the majority of Iranian people of different political views under the leadership of the traditional monarchy. The Shah later declared that Iran's internal situation made him feel the great need for a revolution based on the most advanced principle of justice and human right that would change the framework of Iranian society and make it comparable to that of the most developed country of the world.

Several scholars have examined the White Revolution from various points of view. For example, J. Bill and M. Jonis have looked at it as the politics of system preservation and the politics of maneuvering

respectively, R. Ramazani has considered it as the politics of Independence, while C. Piggmore has analysed in terms of the politics of social modernization. The White Revolution was a means whereby the Shah attempted to achieve two objectives: to widen the popular basis of his rule and to reduce his dependence on the United States. The Revolution represented an attempt on the process of controlled mass mobilization and selected psycho-economic reform in support of his leadership and rule. In expounding the philosophy and working programme of the White Revolution the Shah drew on several sources, ranging from the Iranian cultural heritage and Islamic principle to democracy and westernization. However it was claimed that the idea and the philosophy were purely an Iranian concept. It was a "White Revolution". Its accomplishment was to be through no disorder and no bloodshed not even class hatred. In this context the Revolution was to cover a wide range of innovative things affecting the socio-economic life in Iran which the Shah visualised in terms what he called political economic and social democracy and westernisation for social justice. His use of terms such as democracy and westernization should be understood within the Iranian
context. By political democracy he meant a synthesis of western principle of parliamentary system and the Iranian monarchical situations. He made it clear that he preferred a two party-system over one party system which he considered as a communistic and absolute dictatorship. By economic democracy the Shah meant the equal distribution of resources goods and services according to the abilities and individual needs and the establishment of mixed economic system to be composed of private and public sectors. By social democracy he meant enabling every Iranian citizen to develop himself fully and act freely within the limits of social welfare, national interest and security of the Iranian people.

The implementation of such democracy requires education and psychological development, the reconciliation of individual wishes with social responsibility, the rethinking of moral values and individual social loyalties and learning to work in cooperation more than before. Such an understanding of democracy and westernization pertained only to selective and judicious terms, whereby Iran would liberalized its way of life as far as this was compatible

with Iranian traditions. The monarchy, to the Shah, was a pivotal tradition of Iranian society and he sought refuge in the important tradition in order to legitimise the blend of the institution of monarchy with the requirement of modern times. He wrote:

"Especially in a country with such venerable traditions as ours, rapid change naturally brings its strains and stress. These are the price we must pay for westernization and modernizations. But I do not propose that we abandon our great heritage. On the contrary, I have every confidence that we can enrich it. Religion and philosophy and literature, science and craftsmanship all will prosper more as we develop our economy so that the common people of this ancient land can enjoy all the essentials of life. Instead of the few flourishing at the expense of the many, they will do so with the many. Selective and judicious Westernization can help us towards the goal of democracy and shared prosperity and it is why I refer it to be as our welcome ideal."¹

Against the background of these conditions the Shah officially launched the White Revolution in January.

¹. Ibid p 160.
1962. The Revolution's philosophy and reform programme were declared to be instrumental in transforming Iran from an economically poor and socially divided country into a prosperous, industrialized, self-sufficient and truly an independent sovereign nation.

In order to implement the initial reform of the White Revolution the Shah had already promulgated a Third Five Year Development programme in September 1962. This plan represented the first serious attempt at comprehensive and consistent national planning in Iran. It made projections of the available financial and other sources for the plan period much more clearly than ever before. The plan called for speedy development of agriculture, industry and the social sector. While stressing the importance of public and private investments, it initially proposed a total outlay of 190 billion Rials, over 66 percent of this expenditure was to be met from oil resources estimated at U.S. $ 3000 million during the plan period. Thus for the first time oil income was to be channelled into national development.

The third plan provided the working framework of the White Revolution. By this the Shah was able to mobilise
a large number of masses in support of his leadership. He put his reform-programme to the Iranian people in a referendum, in which 99 percent voted to Shah's programme. The result of the referendum gave the Shah a handle to claim that the Iranian people not only endorsed his Revolution but he also had full support to his regime.

Drawing upon his popular legitimacy the Shah moved forcefully to implement his reform. He started with land reform. After approving some supplementary article to land reform law in January 1963, the Shah started implementing the land reform programme in three stages. Under the first stage the government purchased a total of 60,000 villages (about 14.5% of arable land) from landowners and transferred them to over 74,000 families. It limited the landlords, individual holdings to one village and urged the new rich peasants to join the government guided cooperatives. The second stage of the reform began in 1965. The landowners were offered a choice of five methods of settlement: tenancy; sale to peasants; division of land in the same proportion as the cropsharing agreement; formations of agricultural co-operatives; sales of peasant's right to landowners. Moreover the land reform was to cover
the religious endowment lands. However the peasants were generally given tenure; they did not all receive ownership of land and the conditions under which the land was transferred to them were less favourable than those under the first stage. The third stage of the Reform was launched in 1966. This stage aimed at the expansion of the agricultural production in accordance with the need of Iran's industrial development; a rise in the per capita output and standards of living of peasantry and the improvement of marketing and production techniques and consequently the stabilization of food prices.

Meanwhile forest and pasture lands were nationalized by the government. This was to put these resources in the service of all, to prevent their misuse and waste in the hands of private owners, to develop them according to the needs of the country and above all to support the land reform and strengthen the position of farmers. For the pasture land it was legislated that public ownership be available to sheep and cattlemen. It subsequently nationalized water resources and established

the development and extension crops. The nationalization of water resources pushed up agricultural and industrial development plan.

The land reform, whatever be its socio-economic benefits for the people, proved politically rewarding for the Shah in several ways. He liquidated the large holdings of major landlords thereby undermining their power-base. In this way the Shah had direct access to the majority of the population in the countryside. In this way he was able to meet one of the popular demands of his political opponents, the land reform as a popular and democratic measure. Thus the Shah could claim to have abolished the traditional land base feudalism in Iran and revolutionised the life of the peasantry. As a result, a large number of rich peasants submitted themselves to the Shah in the hope or a better life. The land reform thus opened a potential source of rural support for the Shah's leadership and rule.

But the Shah neither wished to alienate the landlords altogether nor to have a prolonged confrontation with them. The Land Reform was thus balanced by the public

sale of state owned factories to private shares. This reform aimed at enriching the Government with an additional source of revenue, so that it could finance the land reform effectively, and at providing the former land lords with stimulus to re-invest in industry the money which they had received by way of compensation for their lands. Many former land-lords thus soon managed to become industrial lords.

The White Revolution programme stressed the rapid industrialisation of Iran, an improvement in the working and living conditions of the country's industrial labour force. It sought direct investment to establish heavy industry such as steel and petrochemicals. It promoted light industries such as manufacture of consumer items, and sought to protect and strengthen traditional industries such as textile, carpet and food industry. In the mean time, the government legislated a minimum wage and worker's social insurance policy. In each factory, up to 20 percent of the profit was to be distributed among the workers. The profit sharing law was put into execution in June 1963. It was hoped that the law would ensure workers' reasonable wages and increase employment and welfare incentives. All this
created some improvement in the working and living conditions of the workers. It also provided some basis for the growth of an urban working class, largely under the leadership of the Shah. Thus it provided a source of support for the Shah's rule.

The agrarian and industrial measures were accompanied by the Shah's efforts to mobilize women and youth behind his regime. In 1963 the Shah amended the constitution: allowing the women to play an increasingly important part in the political and social life of their country. The women's response to this 'emancipation' was immediate and highly enthusiastic. Soon they took up the challenge and entered nearly every field of social and political activities.

There were women lawyers, judges, parachutists, policewomen, literacy corpswomen, high ranking government officials including a minister, women parliamentarians and many others engaged in various social and political activities. They gave conclusive evidence that, given suitable opportunities, women could be effective members.


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of the society and thus play a significant part in the social and economic reconstruction of their country.

A by-product of the women's emancipation was the enactment of the family protection law. This law aimed at preventing family life from breaking up because of the ease with which some men could marry more than one wife or divorce their wives to marry again.

The emancipation of the Iranian women, supplemented by the family protection law, was hailed both at home and abroad as a very significant social, economic and humanitarian measure. It helped to free the Iranian women from the prejudice-ridden shackles to which they had been subjected, and enabled this very significant portion of the country's population to occupy its rightful place in the Iranian society, a right to which they were fully entitled if by no other reason than their being members of the human race.

For the educated youth the Shah instituted the literacy Corps, Health Corps, Development and Extension Corps and Houses of Equity. Under the first three schemes

1. Ibid. p. 8.
2. Ibid. p. 9.
thousands of unemployed University and High school graduates
drafted as trained cadres to work in rural areas in lieu of
the part of their three years' military service. The
Literacy and Health Corps were to help improve rural
literacy and health and sanitation standards. The
Development and Extension Corps were to guide and to assist
farmers and rural cooperatives in new production. These
corps were collectively entrusted with the task of
propagating the aims and objects of the White Revolution
throughout the country from 1963 to 1971. A total of 98599
men and women served in twenty one teams of Literacy corps
and educated about 1625000 pupils. By 1972 the corps were
active in over 20,000 remote villages. Consequently Iran's
literacy rate rose from 15 percent at the end of 1950's to
about 25 percent at the beginning of 1970's. The Health
corps was established in 1964. By 1972 there were 400
medical groups, each of which covered 20 to 40 villages with
a total population of 8,000 to 20,000. The Development and
Extension Corps were founded in 1965. By 1973 the number of
corps members serving in the scheme was 4692. The Houses of
Equity or the village courts of justice were founded in 1963
to deal with petty offenses. By 1973 there were 300 Houses of
Equity with 24000 corps members or judges on service in

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Through these schemes the government succeeded in the execution of White Revolution and increasing contacts between the rural and urban population. Since the corps members were fulfilling part of the military service in civilian form they provided the government with some justification to emphasize the importance of the civilian role of armed forces and thus justified the expansion of Shah's military power base. In addition the scheme created employment opportunities and opened government controlled avenues for political participation of Graduates, a majority of whom had been previously critical of the Shah's regime for lack of job opportunities. Thus the scheme mobilized a good number of educated Iranian youths behind the Shah's leadership.

The Shah declared "National Reconstruction Reform" which was to narrow the gap in the standards of living between the cities and villages, to pay greater attention to less developed areas, to accelerate rural development and to introduce all modern facilities for transforming Iran.  

into a prosperous and powerful country in its region 1. The administrative aspect of this reform aimed at improving the efficiency and working standard of Iran's public service. It stressed the need for public servants to work honestly and consciously and by accepting the responsibilities of their duty. It promised the decentralization of the administrative system and the protection and public interest as well as improvement in the social welfare and security of public servants. "The educational aspect of the reform was stressed as essential for the continuing successes of administrative and all other introduced reforms. It emphasized need of Iran for trained educational, agricultural, technical and administrative personnel 2."

The Shah failed to couple those socio-economic reforms with any major political reform. He continued to centralize politics under his absolute control to strengthen his central position in Iranian politics. The people were allowed neither to criticise the government policies nor to seek redress for their grievances. The Shah

1. Ibid. p. 07.
continued to maintain the parliament which was reopened in 1963 after a lapse of three years and the two party system and formally allowed the people to elect the Majlis every four years. But as in the past, party membership and elections were strictly controlled by the government and the opposition was suppressed. In fact by 1964 even the principle of two party system seemed to disappear. The Shah instigated a new ruling party called Iran Nawin which was led by his loyal colleague, Ali Mansoor, the Prime Minister from 1964 to 1965. After his assassination in 1965 he was succeeded by his finance minister and the former critic of the Shah's regime, Amir Abbas Huwaida who was responsible for making Iran Nawin the sole political party elections. The formal opposition party Mardum continued only in name. The opponents were to be effectively suppressed. But despite his promises the Shah virtually did not succeed to democratize the Iranian political system. Initially through his reforms, no matter how undemocratic they might be in eyes of his opponents, the Shah, to a certain extent, improved domestic credibility. He had opened up basis of support among peasants, industrial workers, women and

youths, and even intellectual, professionals, technocrats and bureaucrats. Thus mass-mobilization improved the prospects of social and economic stability with the result that the people began to hope for a better future. He had stimulated some social and economic bases thereby gaining a reputation for his revolutionary ideas to reform his society and to improve the living conditions of the Iranian people. Thus the domestic image of the Shah considerably improved and he was able to initiate certain changes in his regional policy in order to attain the goal of White Revolution for an independent national foreign policy. This helped the Shah's regime both to strengthen the regional security as well as to gain regional economic and technical support of his reform.

By the beginning of the 1960s it was clear that the Shah's policy of exclusive alliance with the West opposed to communism, had done his regime more damage than good. Thus the Shah found it imperative to effect domestic reforms along with changes in regional policy. He later emphasised the importance of bilateral relationship with other countries on the basis of peaceful co-existence and co-operation and independence. He conducted his foreign
relation with more flexibility within the limits of his
dergime's alliance within the West and opposition to
communism. He stressed that the foreign policy goal of the
White Revolution should be of the national independence.
He subsequently declared: "Our policy is based on the
maintenance and preservation of peace. We in Iran have
adopted a policy which we call a policy of independent
nationalism. Its essential principles are non-interference
in the internal affairs of other countries and peaceful co
existence. We must go beyond this stage and convert
peaceful co-existence into international co-operation and
understanding especially to countries with different
political and social systems from ours, for without them the
basic difficulties facing the world today, such as
illiteracy, sickness and hunger, cannot be solved. We
believe that the way to safeguard the real interest of our
country is by co-existence and sincere co-operation with all
countries......... on the basis of mutual respect for
national sovereignty......... At the same time....... ...
the establishment.........understanding and peace cannot
be achieved without sincere respect for the principle of
coeistence between different ideologics and systems of
government or without respect for the principle of
noninterference of countries in the internal affairs of others.

To conclude, let us recapitulate the reforms envisaged in the White Revolution. It was in the year of 1334 (shamsi) that the bill for the distribution of the crown properties was passed and in the year 1337 it was actually put in practice. According to this law, every farmer could hold not more than 10 hectares of irrigated or arid land. Hence the crown land was distributed among hundred thousand farmers. But the big land owners, despite this law, were still holding lots of land and the average income of small farmers was not more than fifteen thousand Rials per annum. Keeping this disparity in mind, the Shah introduced a "Land Reform Bill" in the parliament in Khurdad of 1339. But this bill, when passed by the parliament, lost many of its reformatory points and was not more than an artificial aid to the farmers.

In Di Māh of 1340, another bill was passed putting a ceiling to the property owned. According to this, an Irani land owner could not possess more than one tenth of his entire land.

In 1343, another Land Reforms Bill was passed and put into practice. The first township that was affected by this was Maragheh; and after that, it was applied to the entire country.

The third stage of land reform was mechanisation of farming and increase in the agricultural output with the help of modern techniques. A 20 point programme was evolved, consisting of:

1. Acquiring best means of irrigation.

2. Increasing and popularising the use of chemical manure.

3. Mechanisation of agriculture, according to the needs and demands of different agricultural zones in the country.

4. Protection of agricultural product from natural calamity and disease in fields of storages.

5. Technical training of the farm-workers.

6. Proper transportation of the agricultural produce from the farms to the market and
distribution Centres.

7. Expansion and reinforcement of the network of cooperative associations and various other agricultural units.

8. Establishment of economic unit in agriculture.

9. Joining animal husbandry with agriculture.

10. Encouraging investment of capital in agricultural ventures.

11. Encouraging capital investment in animal husbandry and farming.

12. Joining agricultural programmes with industrial Ventures.

13. Cultivation of arid land.


15. Formation of special co-operatives for agricultural products.

For implementing this Programme, it was necessary
to form rural cooperative associations. Therefore, simultaneous with the introduction of this programme, many cooperative associations were founded to help the farmers. These cooperatives gave loans to them, provided them with chemical fertilizers, and arranged irrigation for dry lands. By the end of Mehr Mah, 1345, more than 7,000 cooperatives consisting of 9,000,000 units all over the country were established. More than 16,000 villages were included in these corporations. The capital invested was about 800 million Rials.

In the middle of 1342, the Central Organisation for Rural Development was established under the auspices of the Agricultural Ministry. A Bank of credit for Rural and Agricultural Development was also established. The basic functions of this organisation were:

1. To specify the ways of working of these co-operative associations.

2. Expansion of the co-operative network.

3. Advancing credit to these co-operatives.

4. To find market for dispensation of agricultural produce.
5. Advancement of cottage industries.

6. To establish contact with international co-operative.

The Bank of Credit and Rural Advancement gave loans to the farmers. About 4 hundred million Rials was given as loan to farmers during the last four years. The bank also gave loan for the drought hit lands.

Modification in Land Inheritance

According to the new law, the lands of the deceased cannot be distributed among the inheritors if it is less than 10 hectares.

Irrigational Reforms

1. Nationalization of Water Resources.

2. Water Reservoirs.


5. Canals.
6. Channelisation of rivers.

7. Procuring technical aids for water supply throughout the year.

8. To tap and utilise underground water resources.

9. To save water in daily consumption.