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Centre for Policy Studies

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La. *Paul*
March 28, 1980

Dear Michael,

I thought you might be interested in another conversation I had recently with Baskier in Paris. pl. send a copy to the Foreign office if you think it interesting enough. x

Yours ever

Hugh

x Copy enclosed.

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I went to see Mr. Bashkir to-day in his large, barely-furnished flat in Paris, 52 Boulevard Inkerman. This third-floor residence is heavily guarded by police on both the street and the third-floor level. A large map of Iran was the only decoration.

Bashkir looked tired but was lively. A survivor of Paris in the 30s, he had organised propoganda and arms for the Spanish Republicans in the civil war as a student. He had fought in the French Resistance. Our conversation was in French, which he speaks fluently. In many ways, he seemed typical of the moderately progressive French intellectual who once was further to the Left than he now is. He still retained some rather fixed ideas about the thirties (the "tragedy of the 1930s was that the British government was on the Right and the French on the Left"), and he seemed still under the impression that the US had "pushed" Castro and Cuba into the arms of the Soviet Union - an untenable view. He went out of his way to say that he is now working full time for Iranian freedom.

His analysis of Iran was that the Shah had destroyed the national political life and had been encouraged to do so by the Americans. Nixon had been particularly responsible. So it had been impossible even to organise a Right-wing political party: even a reactionary one. It was not oil but authoritarian monarchism which ruined Iran. The money gained from oil was disgracefully mis-spent and the country was disgracefully mis-

managed: brothels had benefited, not the people.

When the Shah destroyed the political life of Iran, two forces only were left: the mullahs and the communists. The communists went underground. People turned to Khomeini because his was the only voice which challenged the Shah - not because they were religious. They are not. Iran's religion is a fraud (trucage). He went on (more or less): "when I had my opportunity, it was too late. I tried to make an arrangement with Khomeini but I could not. He had only one idea, at that time, to restore the Middle Ages. It is an impossible idea. There is no responsible force in Iran. Only Khomeini. But he and the mullahs are incapable of running a 20th century country. To run the country you need cadres. Banks, industry, trade unions also need cadres. But they do not exist. 2000 doctors have left Iran since the Shah fell."

"The Americans think highly of Beni Sadr. But they will get nowhere with him. He is not a responsible President. Without Khomeini he would be nothing. If Khomeini dies, he will be less than nothing."

"So, everything is being run down. Nothing works."

"When Khomeini falls, the only party capable of taking over will be the communists. They are working hard. They will be ready to take over. They have organised many supporters throughout the country, particularly among the Arabs in the oil zone. But also in Azerbaijan. I do not know about Baluchistan."

"The Americans, particularly Brzezinski, think that Muslims will never choose communism. They are wrong. Anyway, the Iranians won't be able to choose anything. And, anyway, Iranians are not so religious as all that." (See above)

"Once Iran becomes communist, it will become so forever. Iraq, the Gulf, Turkey will follow."

"It is because I see this that I am fighting, organising, and preparing in every way I can."

"The BBC is not being helpful. It could be. People listen to it. It could have great moral influence."

"I do not want the Americans to land troops, tanks, artillery. But I would like assistance - money, technical and logistical support. The people of Iran must overthrow Khomeini before he dies. Otherwise, the communist will win. I have told the Americans. They always say 'yes, next week we will help'. They do not. I have told France. I have told this to Julian Amery and Colonel Maclean (Billy Maclean) who came to see me recently."

"The Americans should forget the hostages. If they cease making so much fuss, they will get them released. Carter should cease thinking that it is more important to save 50 people - who are only prisoners - than lose the whole of the Middle East. In Vietnam, they lost 50,000 men, not counting those they killed. They should not determine their entire foreign policy on the basis of the future of the hostages. Khomeini cannot release them because he would lose face if he did."

"The regions of Iran ought to have autonomy. They do not, anyway, want independence. Autonomy would suit them, really. Not every region wants to be autonomous."

NOTE

The above is the gist of Mr. Bashkir's remarks as written down by me from memory afterwards. I have a good memory for conversations of this nature but I do not guarantee that he put his thoughts (anyway expressed in French) exactly as above. I was in Paris to give a lecture.

HT/26.3.80.

Hugh Thomas
March 26, 1980