

# What Khomeini has destroyed

Until the feudalist-clerical revolution that toppled the Shah, Iran was on its way to becoming perhaps the premier example of the process of industrialization.

Often, in interviews during the 1970s, the Shah repeated his hope that Iran would by the year 2000 enter the ranks of the top ten industrial countries of the world. Though he was ridiculed for that statement by the noisy anti-Shah lobby, and though Iran's own development planning was infested with secret collaborators of Ayatollah Khomeini, what Iran had accomplished before the revolution was an important achievement.

The driving force behind Iranian industrialization was oil production, under the direction of the NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company), in 1978 probably the biggest petroleum corporation in the world. During the 1970s, the Shah battled the British-dominated oil cartel that for decades had controlled Iranian oil. His refusal to submit to London's terms for renewal of the 25-year accord that expired in 1978 was a crucial factor in the decision of the British to bring down the Shah. In the last year before the Shah fell, NIOC produced well over 6 million barrels of oil per day. Construction was underway to expand output to 7.2 million. Current Iranian production is around 200,000 barrels a day!

Iran's industrial development was at the takeoff point—with plant and equipment that now lie in ruins.

**Nuclear:** In the field of nuclear energy, Iran was far and away the leader of the Third World. A staggering total of 32 nuclear power plants were either under construction or on the drawing boards in 1978, with most of them due to come on line before 1990. France and West Germany held contracts to construct \$30 billion worth of nuclear installations. In 1978 Iran was also talking with the United States about a \$25 billion nuclear package, never consummated. Iran had begun to exploit what is thought to be enormous reserves of uranium ore. Iranian scientists and engineers had already begun work on nuclear fusion energy research.

**Steel:** The enormous Soviet-built Aryamehr steel works in Isfahan was the centerpiece of Iran's exciting new steel

industry. Already producing 1.9 million tons of steel annually in 1978, by 1985 the Aryamehr works were slated to have an output of 8 million tons per year, making it one of the largest steel plants in the world. The parent National Iranian Steel Company (NISC) had also begun to build several other facilities, including plants using the most advanced, high-technology gas-reduction equipment. By 1983—had the revolution not destroyed everything—new plants at Ahwaz, Bandar Abbas, Isfahan, and other sites would have given Iran a steel capacity of over 15 million tons a year. By comparison, U.S. steel production in 1978 was 136 million tons.

The steel sector was the university of industry in Iran. The Isfahan plant served as a center for training skilled and semi-skilled workers, and engineers and managers for the entire nation. Said a chief of NISC, "Our income is not only from steel sales but also from intangible assets of training. We have a big turnover in labor, and that is exactly the aim of the government—workers learn skills here and take them to where they are needed. In fact we run a formal school, a training center for 7000 students." That was in 1978. Under Khomeini, the most precious asset of Iran—its labor force—is being exterminated.

**Copper:** In 1979, the Sar Cheshmeh Copper Mining Company was beginning production of 142,000 tons of copper per year, placing Iran in the top six copper-producing countries in the world. With over 400 million tons of copper reserves under the ground, an entire new city had been under construction in Sar Cheshmeh. It already had a 25,000 population, complete with mine, smelting and refining plants, and plants for fabrication. A new rail line was on the drawing board.

**Machine Tools:** The huge Tabriz Machine Tool Plant, a multibillion dollar complex, annually produced 10,000 tons of drills, pumps, lathes, milling machines, compressors, and presses. Built in 1966, it had created in Tabriz a complex machine-tool industry, including a tractor factory, engine plants, truck and bus assembly plants, and other heavy industry. Thousands of Iranian peasants flocked to Tabriz to join the growing industrial labor force there. Like Isfahan steel, the Tabriz machine-tool plant—with its own vocational school—produced thousands of trained workers and managers for smaller plants.

**Auto:** Ten percent of Iran's labor force was employed in the automobile industry, under the control of the Iran National Vehicle Manufacturing Company. The plant produced 130,000 vehicles per year. More and more of the finished product was comprised of Iranian parts. General Motors, British Leyland, Daimler-Benz, Volvo, Renault, Mercedes, and Mack Truck built plants in Iran along the same industrial corridor. France's Renault alone produced 60,000 vehicles annually.