

## EXCURSUS 1

### Victoria Goff on PERSECUTION IN IRAN

Iranian Baha'is, whose adherents are estimated at 500,000, are in danger of extermination. Baha'i officials firmly believe that the religious leaders who govern Iran are systematically trying to destroy the Baha'i faith. Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Commission report that substantial numbers of Baha'i adherents have been burned alive, lynched by mobs, or executed by revolutionary firing squads after mock trials. Other Baha'is have been beaten, kidnapped, summarily arrested. Their homes, stores, schools, and hospitals have been looted and burned. The wire services report that Baha'is have been fired from their jobs, their pensions have been cancelled, and their personal property has been seized. Government authorities have confiscated the assets of Baha'i-owned businesses. Baha'i marriages have been declared void and the offspring barred from school. In addition, Baha'i shrines have been demolished, cemeteries desecrated, and more than a hundred religious centers occupied by the government.

In many of Iran's cities members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies, the governing bodies of the local Baha'i communities, have been arrested. In August, 1980, the eight men and one woman who constituted the National Spiritual Assembly were also arrested. There has been no word of their whereabouts and they are presumed dead.

The Baha'is, Iran's largest religious minority, believe in the oneness of humanity and in the need to overcome prejudices based on race, creed, class, nationality, and sex. They consider all religions divinely inspired, and all are said to honor the same God, who is revealed through progressive revelations. Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Bud-

dha, Zoroaster, Christ, Muhammad, and their own founder, Baha'u'llah, are accepted as prophets. To Muslims, for whom Muhammad is the last of God's prophets, the Baha'is are heretics.

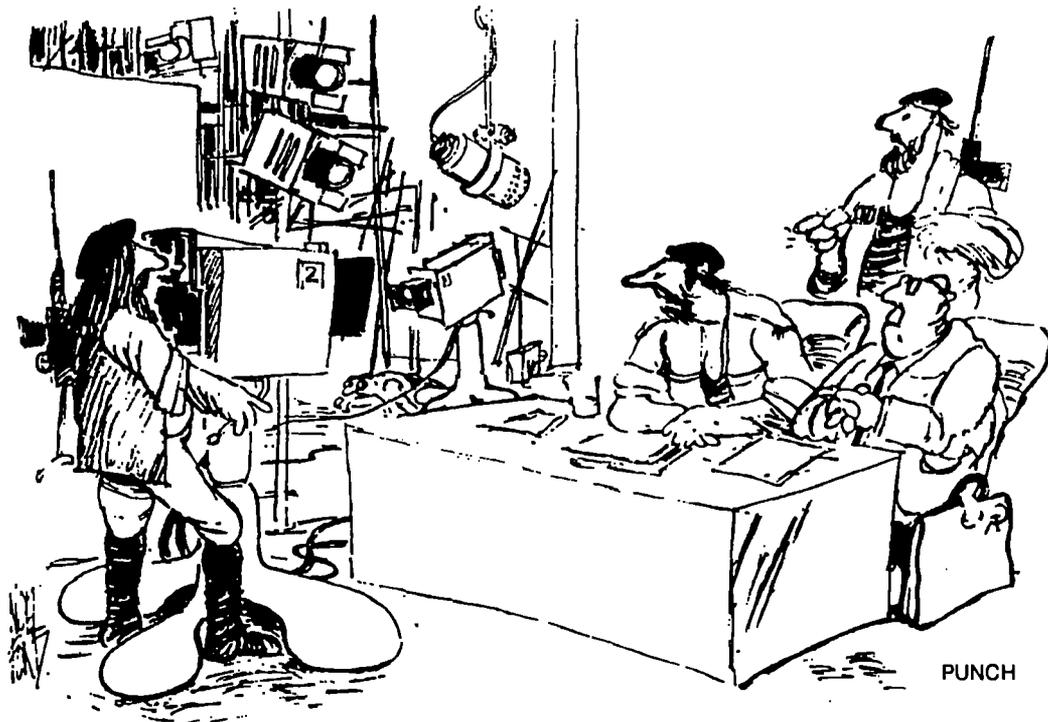
Many Shi'ites, Iran's predominant Muslim sect, also find offensive the fact that Baha'i women mingle with men, do not wear the *chador*, and are eligible for all positions in the Iranian Baha'i leadership. The Baha'is stress on education has resulted in a disproportionate number of Baha'is in the professions, which has created animosity among the Iranians. Baha'is also arouse nationalist suspicions because they consider world government an ideal. Prohibited by their religion from taking part in partisan politics, Baha'is offer fealty to whatever government is in power. This nonpolitical stance has created problems for them under both the shah and the current regime.

In fact, the followers of the Baha'i faith have been persecuted since the birth of their religion in nineteenth-century Persia. Between 1845 and 1920 more than twenty thousand Baha'is were killed in Iran. There are crises every decade or so, especially during times of national stress.

The Muslim clergy has periodically incited the Iranian people against the Baha'is. For example, in 1955 during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, a mullah broadcast daily sermons over government radio exhorting the Muslim faithful to kill every man, woman, and child of the Baha'i faith. The army took over the Baha'i National Center in Teheran, the Parliament banned the "Baha'i sect," and, according to a contemporary report, "this was followed by an orgy of senseless murder, rape, pillage and destruction." The turmoil diminished only when Dag Hammarskjöld, the then United Nations secretary-general, spearheaded a worldwide publicity campaign.

Today only the three smaller religious minorities (Jews, Christians, and pre-Islamic Zoroastrians) are recognized under the Iranian Constitution.

Although the current persecution is primarily religious in inspiration, the revolutionaries have also accused the



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Baha'is of collaborating with the deposed Pahlavi regime, acting as American agents, being Zionists, and promoting prostitution. All the major world news agencies have rejected these accusations.

The government may no longer need to make its case on such charges. In March, 1981, the High Court of Justice in Teheran upheld the decision of a local revolutionary court in Shiraz condemning two local Baha'i leaders to death for practicing their religion and belonging to Baha'i institutions. The High Court's decision in effect makes the practice of the Baha'i religion a capital offense, and outside of Iran there is great concern for the safety of some 4,500 members of Baha'i Local Spiritual Assemblies. Local revolutionary courts in other cities immediately enforced the ruling and executed scores of Baha'i leaders on similar charges, according to a report compiled by the Baha'i international community.

On September 9, 1981, the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities voted unanimously to express its grave concern over the plight of Iran's Baha'is and termed the situation "perilous." The U.N. resolution confirmed that Baha'is are being subjected to summary arrest, torture, execution, and other forms of harassment as a result of their religious beliefs. The governments of Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and West Germany, in addition to the European Parliament, have adopted formal resolutions on behalf of the Baha'is of Iran.

Iran's rulers are not likely to be moved by these well-intentioned pleas from the international community. In fact, it is conceivable that the floundering regime may actually intensify its persecution of this traditional scapegoat in an attempt to draw attention from its own problems.

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## EXCURSUS 2

### István Csicsery-Rónay on THE MISSION OF WRITERS IN EXILE

An Indian friend once asked me if I believed in the transmigration of souls. I answered that I was beginning to believe in it since observing how many of my Hungarian friends have become Americans and how many others at home have become renegades.

I do not dispute that many of the skilled professionals, scientists, and artists who fled oppression at home to become refugees in the West have become constructive germinal elements in their new homelands, rendering mankind a great service and, at the same time, enhancing the reputation of their native land. The great loss, in fact, was to their homeland. It is heartrending to think of the exodus of 200,000 skilled Hungarians following the suppression of the Revolution in 1956. Such an enormous loss, out of a total population of 10 million, has irremediable effects on the society.

There remain, however, those who, catapulted by such historical catastrophes to a strategic vantage point in the world, have been liberated from local responsibilities and have gained a wider vision by tens of thousands of miles—as well as an inevitable sense of responsibility toward both their own people and all of mankind. They have developed a nearly complete independence from Power, allowing them an instinctive understanding of humanity's affairs.

They have preserved their faith in the genius of their nation while becoming internationalists—in the best sense of the word. In exile they represent important particles of their people's consciousness. By their activities they provide faith, knowledge, perspective, a sense of proportion and balance to those brainwashed, misinformed, or just narcotized by that new opium of the masses, i.e., relative affluence. At the same time, they establish connections between all of the world's oppressed and bring their sufferings to the attention of world opinion. Today, when the rights and conditions of workers seem to be improving nearly everywhere, the world's true proletariat are the politically, ethnically, nationally, and religiously oppressed, whether by dictatorships of the Right or the Left; the exiles, above all the writers, are their spokesmen.

We often hear the question, and not always from the other side, "Is there sense in exile?" It is worth confronting this problem openly.

We do not condemn those who have remained at home and tried to assume the spiritual leadership of their people, even though they may have had to compromise a great deal to do so. But we ask everyone to understand our mission and purpose as well.

To become almost totally independent from power—often the principal vehicle of evil—to approximate as much as humanly possible a state of anarchy that must, at the same time, be accompanied by an immense sense of responsibility, and, above all, to serve the truth whether it concerns the past, present, or future—these are the principles that guide our attitudes and behavior.

Our tasks are so multidimensional that I will enumerate them only partially:

To the world, we have to convey a sense of the deepest spirit of our people, unadulterated by political distortions.

For our people, we have to fill the gap brought on by dictatorship in the areas of intellectual creativity and of the assimilation of the cultures of the world. Our duty is to write or transmit that which authors at home are unable to owing to censorship or self-censorship, or that which is concealed about foreign accomplishments of the regime.

Just as a conscious individual is unable to exist without a knowledge of his past, his deeds, and his real condition, the brainwashing and artificial amnesia forced upon oppressed peoples is a great calamity for them. We have to acquaint them with their ancient and recent history, as well as with their actual present situation in the world.

In solidarity with those continuing to struggle at home, we have to represent the global community of oppressed people.

The world around us tries to assimilate us and to force us to transmigrate or reincarnate. But we do not wish to be alienated from our people, nor do we wish to become victims of brainwashing.

There are some among us who once expected to be executed if captured; there is even one who was shot in the head and owes his life only to a miracle (and his hard skull). Most of us were imprisoned for some time, tortured, or forced into hiding—sometimes successively by both kinds of dictatorships, of the Right and the Left. We became familiar with such depths and heights of human baseness and solidarity that we learned to live life with an intensity unknown to those who have lived all their lives in freedom. Our sensitivity to good and evil is born of experiences similar to those endured by Dostoevski waiting to be executed. Our models are the great exiles—Dante, Byron, Mickiewicz, Victor Hugo, and Hermann Hesse. In the words of another great emigrant, Béla Bartók: "We do not drink from goblets, we drink straight from the spring." Living among the happy citizens of our host countries, in a