



Iran Data Portal

Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran The Freedom Movement of Iran

The Freedom Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran* – NAI) was formed in 1961 by Mehdi Bazargan, Yadollah Sahabi, and Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, who all were former active members of the National Front. While they believed in the separation of mosque and state, they also believed that political activity should be guided by religious values. They supported the idea of a constitutionalist monarchy, but sought to restrict the Shah’s power within the boundaries of the constitution. They also were of the view that Iran should keep its international neutrality and independence.

After the 1963 uprising, the group’s leaders were arrested, spending many years in prison. Due to the severe repression inside the country after 1963, the activities of the movement were severely restricted and could only continue outside the country. While they did not engage in revolutionary activity before the revolution, they eventually joined the revolutionaries under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1978. On February 5, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan, the secretary-general of the party, to form an interim government. However, as a result of quarrels between Bazargan’s government and Ayatollah Khomeini’s followers, the government resigned on 9 November 1979. The quarrels concerned issues such as articles regarding special rights for clergy in the constitution, parallel revolutionary institutions that conflicted with the government’s activities, and the occupation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, which Bazargan staunchly opposed.

In the first parliamentary elections in 1980, the NAI won a few seats and was an active member of the opposition against the Party of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In all subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections, the party members were disqualified from running. In 1987, the Minister of Interior, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, wrote a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini requesting him to ban the NAI’s political activities. Based on an alleged response by Khomeini, the Minister then announced the NAI illegal. The NAI

never accepted the authenticity of Khomeini's response. Despite their disqualifications in several elections, NAI members continued to engage in political activities peacefully. The NAI does respect the constitution, but is also critical of it. It generally supports a liberal reading of Islam. Culturally, it tries to synthesize modern and Islamic values, and economically it rejects state interventionism. It also opposed continuing the war with Iraq after the lost territory had been reconquered in 1982.

In the late 1980s, many members of the party were arrested because of their criticism of government policies. In the 1997 presidential election, Ebrahim Yazdi, the secretary-general of the party, was disqualified by the Guardian Council, and NAI members cast blank ballots as a result. However, with Khatami's landslide victory, they backed and joined the reform movement. They also backed Khatami in his second presidential election in 2001.

In the 2005 election, they supported Mostafa Moeen who lost the race to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. With Ahmadinejad's government, the pressures on the NAI increased and the Ministry of Intelligence prevented the group from convening its congress as well as holding other events and gatherings. In the 2009 elections, they invited voters to vote for Mehdi Karroubi or Mir-Hossein Mousavi. In the protests after the election, the NAI officially called the elections "stolen" and Ahmadinejad's new government "illegitimate." In the government's crackdown, several members of the NAI were arrested.

Prominent members of the NAI include Ebrahim Yazdi, the secretary-general (since Bazargan's passing in 1995) and the foreign minister in the interim government (1979); Hashem Sabaghian, the Minister of Interior in the interim government; Mohammad Tavassoli, mayor of Tehran during the interim government; and Gholam Abbas Tavassoli, a sociology professor of Tehran University.

Official Website: <http://www.nehzateazadi.org/>

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