Afghanistan continues its Experiment in Democracy
The Tripartite Parliament in Kabul
by Susan Duprey

AFGHANISTAN

Elections of the tripartite parliament and forever the existence of the communist party will forever be the country. But even in a land wide roused ethically concerned with the power of the former emigrant from outside, there must always be a strain.

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The American Universities Field Staff

This fieldstaff report is one of a continuing series on international affairs and developments in some of the major global issues of our time. All reports in the series are prepared by writers who are full-time Associates of the Field Staff, spending long periods abroad and returning to the United States periodically to lecture on the campuses of the universities and colleges that sponsor the American Universities Field Staff.

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ALAN W. HORTON
Executive Director

About the writer:

LOUIS DUPREE has specialized in the Indo-European language areas of the Middle East and Central Asia, emphasizing Afghanistan and Iran. His anthropology studies at Harvard University earned him the B.A. (1949), M.A. (1953), and Ph.D. (1954) degrees. Dr. Dupree has made two field trips to Afghanistan for the American Museum of Natural History, of which he is a Research Associate, and one to Iran for the University of Pennsylvania. A former Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the Air University, he joined the Field Staff in 1959. Concurrent with his Fieldstaff appointment, he is an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University. His published works include nine monographs and numerous articles and reviews in such varied publications as The Nation, the Economist, Evergreen Review, and the Middle East Journal. He is based in Kabul to observe developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Soviet Central Asia, particularly in regard to their relationships with the United States.
AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES ITS EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY
The Thirteenth Parliament is Elected

by Louis Dupree

July 1971

Since World War II, most of the former colonial countries of Africa and Asia have experimented with forms of representative government. Many have tried several varieties; most have abandoned the effort, to fall back on one party, one man, an oligarchy, or a junta, with palace coups or military musical chairs constituting the only real political dynamics. In 1963, Afghanistan (without a colonial past, but owing its national identity in part to the frictions of nineteenth-century European colonialism and imperialism) began its own experiment with democratic processes. The experiment continues and, although it may not be the unlawed success its proponents might desire, it appears to function better than its critics proclaim.

The resignation of Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan in 1963, after a decade of autocratic but gradually loosening control, the promulgation of a new (1964) Constitution, the holding of the first relatively free elections, a rise in student political activity, and a somewhat freer functioning of the nongovernment sector of the press; all these helped to generate a movement toward democratically representative government which probably can be stopped only by a palace coup and/or the imposition of a tight military dictatorship.

In August and September of 1969, Afghanistan held its second free elections under the new Constitution and although there were criticisms of government interference in certain contests, the nation seemed to have taken a step toward creation of a constitutional monarchy.

Some pre-election patterns deserve mention: the continued rise of student power; the indecisiveness of the lame-duck government; the emergence of national political figures in some nonurban areas; the softening of the leftist line (except among student groups); the increased participation of urban women in pre-election campaigning; the partial surfacing of rural power elites; the continued absence of real political parties (the Political Parties Act remains unimplemented as I write).

As the campaign intensified, development projects continued at varying rates of speed, several ministries (particularly Planning, Agriculture, Mines and Industries, Public Works) looked ahead and planned other projects, Finance and Commerce continued to seek ways of increasing internal revenues and exports; Foreign Affairs maintained its bi-tarafī (“without sides” or nonalignment) posture, alienating none, offending none. The day-to-day operations of the government bureaucracy muddled through, as bureaucracies have a habit of doing.

While the central government (the Cabinet and its supporting Ministries) was lackadaisical about its executive responsibilities, it was active (though not open) in exerting pressures on the candidates it preferred to see defeated. The procedure usually was simply to find scapegoats to carry the blame for all the ills of Afghanistan and to permit the circulation of rumors that might hurt the campaigns of opposition candidates. One Kabul wag suggested that “scape-buzkashi has replaced straight buzkashi (goat grabbing) as our national sport.”

Most who came under attack were in the camp of former Prime Minister Mohammad Hashim-
Maiwandwal, who held that office from October 1965 to November 1967. He was subjected to considerable harassment throughout the campaign and right through the days of balloting. Candidates out of favor with the government sometimes were rumored to have been arrested. Afghans, experienced in the way of local politics, interpret such rumors as evidence that the incumbent government disapproves of the involved candidates. Maiwandwal was rumored for a time to be under arrest, as was Sayyid Mohammad Qasem Rishtya, a minister in many Cabinets over the past 20 years and currently Ambassador to Japan. The two were not political colleagues, however. Rishtya was a contributor to Hadaf, a newspaper created specifically to oppose Maiwandwal's candidacy, which ceased publication after the elections. The rumor about Rishtya may have been intended to hurt his brother, Mir Mohammad Siddiq Farhang, an incumbent candidate for the Wolesi Jirgah (Lower House).

The effectiveness of the kind of harassment to which Maiwandwal was subjected is hard to gauge. He lost the election but some Afghan observers were convinced that the pressure put on him and others increased their stature among the literate electorate.

In the months before the elections the Shura (Parliament) put aside legislative activity while the Lower House busied itself with investigations, often snatching of inquisitions. Each ministry had its own investigative committee, with a built-in Torquemada or Joe McCarthy. The committees made charges which seldom were substantiated, and no prophylactic legislation was introduced.

Contrapuntal to the political campaign, through the months leading up to the elections, were a series of student strikes and demonstrations and the massive police busts of May 1969.

The election process was set in motion on April 21, when His Majesty King Mohammad Zahir Shah issued a firman (Royal Decree) to announce that the elections would be held as scheduled, in accordance with Title IV of the 1964 Constitution and the 1965 Parliamentary Election Law.

The King announced the following plans for elections to the thirteenth Parliament: (1) Polling for the Meshrano Jirgah or Upper House would take place in the country at large between August 26 and September 10, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Election Law, and the number of election supervisory commissions would equal the number of polling stations; voting in the urban centers of Kabul, Herat, and Qandahar would be limited to a maximum of five days and would begin on September 3; (2) Elections to the Wolesi Jirgah would be held throughout Afghanistan between September 10 and September 24, 1969; (3) His Majesty appointed a Central Supervisory Election Commission to oversee the election procedures: registering voters, approving polling stations, printing ballots, supervising the actual balloting and counting of votes; the Commission comprised Chairman, Dr. Abdul Wahid Hoqoqi (Director of the Secretariat of the Judiciary Department of the Ministry of Justice, who was appointed to the Supreme Court after the elections), Professor Mohammad Asghar (Minister of Justice), Dr. Mohammad Omar Wardak (Minister of the Interior), Mohammad Basir Lodi (Deputy Minister of the Interior) and Fazl Rabi Pazhwak (Rector of Kabul University). (4) A list of eligible voters would be published on May 24, so that [theoretically] candidates could challenge bogus registrations.

Any national over 25, male or female, who had not been deprived of political rights (by reason of insanity or conviction of a felony) was eligible to register and vote. In practice, few women outside of Kabul participated in the elections. The age stipulation was hard to administer because births usually go unregistered and few Afghans know precisely when they were born. Even the date on an individual's tazkira (the identification card carried by most Afghans) is usually only a guess and sometimes obviously a decade or more off. Since many potential voters had neither birth certificates nor tazkira, the Supervisory Commission ruled that anybody past puberty would be registered, provided witnesses would attest that he or she had lived in Afghanistan for at least ten years. Those who met this test were issued temporary identification cards and permitted to vote.

Article 46 of the 1964 Constitution specifies the qualifications of those who sit as Members of Parliament:
Dancing with election posters during Wolesi Jirgah elections, Chahrdeh-i-Ghorband, Parwan Province.

Near a village polling station, during Wolesi Jirgah elections. Paja, Parwan Province.
Supporters of Ali Ahmad Naimi near Third District polling station in Kabul.

Posters supporting winning candidate, Mohammad Yousuf Benish, in Third District, Kabul.
Persons appointed or elected to membership in the Shura (Parliament) must meet the following requirements in addition to their qualifications as voters:

(1) Must have acquired Afghan nationality at least ten years prior to the date of nomination or election.

(2) Must not have been punished by a court with deprivation of political rights after the promulgation of this constitution.

(3) Must be able to read and write.

(4) Members of the Wolesi Jirgah must have completed the age of 25 at the time of the election and those of the Mosharano Jirgah the age of 30 at the time of their nomination or election.

The Central Supervisory Election Commission appointed District SECs throughout the provinces to assist in registering voters and the polling. Hopeful had to apply by June 24 (i.e., within 60 days of the beginning of the elections), but the date was extended for the Wolesi Jirgah applications until July 9 (4:30 P.M.) to accommodate applicants residing in relatively remote regions.

Government employees were eligible to run for Parliament only if they resigned from their jobs. Those working in Kabul were required to resign three months in advance of the beginning of the polling; those in the provinces, six months before. Some provincial officials initially tried to resign by telegram, but the Central Commission ruled that only signed letters would be accepted. Those working on contracts were not considered officials, and would not lose their contracts if they ran for office. A total of 2,030 candidates were found eligible to stand for Parliament; only two were women.

At first, the Central Commission ruled that all voters except civil servants must vote where their birth certificates or razkira had been issued; civil servants could vote at the polling station nearest their place of work. The Commission later revised its ruling and announced that “in order to prevent the stoggage of work in the industrial and commercial establishments, the workers may vote in the nearest polling stations.” The revised ruling had little impact however, because most Afghans live and work near their places of birth. Furthermore, many of those who had migrated from their native areas preferred to return at election time to vote for kinsmen or friends.

The Central Commission, with the experience of only one previous election and the Parliamentary Election Law as a guideline, groped its way toward the moment of truth. Given the situation, it accomplished its task reasonably well.

During the campaign, the Central Supervisory Commission and the government-controlled press and radio constantly reminded the free (nongovernment) press, the candidates, and the potential voters to toe the line as far as Article 28 of the Parliamentary Election Law was concerned. Newspapers were cautioned not to accept political advertising unless the candidate could produce his certificate of eligibility to run for either the Upper or Lower House. Candidates were cautioned to avoid “allegations against person” in the publication of their programs or manifestos, and were reminded that “libel, slander and malicious writings and unproven allegations were prohibited.” Violations would be punished under the Press Law.

Several free newspapers (among them Musawat, Afghan Mellat, Parcham and Caravan had issues either suppressed or held up because of real or imagined violations.

The checking of the voter registration lists ended on June 24. In areas with no printing facilities, handwritten or typed lists of eligible voters were posted. According to official figures released by the Central Supervisory Commission 2,512,377 people registered to vote. The breakdown by province is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>172,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herat</td>
<td>162,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghazni</td>
<td>148,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jozjan</td>
<td>126,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faryab</td>
<td>125,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkh</td>
<td>120,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paktya</td>
<td>116,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badakhshan</td>
<td>114,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qandahar</td>
<td>107,444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ningrah Dar 104,111
Bakhar 101,091
Kunduz 100,162
Farwan 91,207
Baghlan 87,266
Wardak 82,598
Jirzgan 77,795
Samangan 77,000
Badghis 74,679
Hafar 74,591
Takhar 72,500
Ghazni 68,615
Zarar 68,524
Kandahar 47,951
Ghor 47,157
Kandahar 44,451
Kunar 41,665
Jalalabad 27,956
Zabul 27,403

Total 2,512,377

Considering the fact that the total population of Afghanistan may be about 15 million, 2.5 million registered voters is a fantastic figure, but it must be remembered that most potential voters did not come forward to register; the government simply compiled lists of those eligible from official records, and probably no more than 10 per cent of them voted.

Of the 216 incumbents in the Wolesi Jirgah, less than 150 candidates for re-election and some of those shifted constituencies as the law permits. For example, in 1965 Mrs. Masuma Ismati Wardak was elected to the Wolesi Jirgah from Maruf District, Farah Province. In 1969, she chose to stand for the Second Ward in Kabul; in a news interview she said that, though born in Qandahar, she had lived much of her life in Kabul, and felt capable of winning in either constituency. As it turned out, she lost narrowly to a formidable opponent, Babak Karmal, a leading leftist and also an incumbent. No women were elected to the 1969 Wolesi Jirgah. The only other woman to run, Miss Zuleika, Badakhshan Center, was also defeated.

Little interest was evidenced in the 28 races for the Mehsra Jirgah, one Senator being elected from each province. For example, in the Kabul Province election, the winner was the incumbent, Abdul Hadi Dawi, a well-known poet-journalist who was named President of the Senate by the King in 1965 and again in 1969. It was reported he received 26 votes; his nearest opponent garnered only 15. (However, some sources say Senator Dawi received 3,000 of the potential 173,000 votes in Kabul Province). The composition of the Senate is partly elective, partly appointive. The king appointed 28 Senators in 1965 to serve for five years; 28 are elected (one from each province) every four years; another 28 are supposed to be elected every three years by the Provincial Councils, which, however, have yet to be instituted. Some Afghan legal experts maintain that the Senate does not constitutionally exist because it has only two-thirds of the number of members called for by the Constitution.

In the following discussion concerning the Wolesi Jirgah elections, the two Afghans (Kabul and the rest of the country) must be kept in mind. In Kabul, the elections aroused great interest among the literate segment of the population, and the five seats were hotly contested in the ten nahiyah or wards (a district consists of two wards).

Several interesting patterns were discernible in the Kabul city Wolesi Jirgah elections, held from September 10-14. All five contests were heated and many candidates were prominent and capable figures. Leading contenders in the First District were Mir Mohammad Siddiq Farhang (formerly a Fourth District wakil) and a handpicked, peripheral member of the clan of the royal family, Mohammad Isq Osman, who promised to break a legislative logjam by leading the new Wolesi Jirgah into the ways of political conservatism, in opposition to the small but articulate liberal and leftist groups. One key candidate, Gulam Haider Panjsher, withdrew to help Farhang's candidacy and was rewarded with the managership of the Bank-i-Melli branch office in Karachi, Pakistan. It was a useful move, because most of the constituents in the First District are Tajik from the Panjsher. However, Isq Osman, whose mother was a Panjsher, enjoyed an important leverage factor on voters in the matrilineally oriented (though ideally patrilineal) Afghan society. Osman won by a narrow margin over Farhang and four other contenders. He has not been able to fulfill his promises of action in the Parliament, which is understandable, in light of the intransigent individualism of the Afghan wakil. Less understandable is his de-
cision to withdraw from his party, the Ittehad-i-Melli in March of this year. His parliamentary stance in recent sessions has been somewhat closer to the left, if his public utterances are to be believed.

The thirteenth Parliament, elected in 1969, misses Farhang’s parliamentary skill and economic expertise. Many Afghans think that the more liberal members of the royal family very likely favored Farhang’s candidacy and that the decision to support Osman was a mistake both in long-term strategy and short-term tactics. Actually, Farhang has closer ties to the center of power than is generally realized. Several members of his family have married into the clan of the royal family, a point that is overlooked by many Afghans because of Farhang’s consistently independent posture.

In the Second District, the putative leftist, Babrak Karmal, who defeated the only woman to run in Kabul, was the target of attacks from the far left during the campaign. The Shi‘a-yi-jawad (a Maoist-type newspaper) accused him of being a government stooge (his father is an army general), planted among the leftists to create dissension. Babrak, of course, denies the charges, and those who know him believe that, if he is not really a leftist, he is independent. However, the aura of suspicion remains, particularly since other leftists languish in jail, including several who were approved as candidates but who made speeches containing derogatory remarks about king, religion, or country. Two leftists, Abdul Hadi Karim (Panjsher District, Kabul Province) and Ghulam Dastagir anjheri (not a candidate, but an active supporter of Hadi Karim), were sentenced, respectively, to ten years and ten years in prison. Hadi Karim suffered a nervous breakdown and was subsequently released.

Others running against Babrak included Ghulam abd Khater (editor of Saba), Engineer Mohammad Ali, and Mohammad Omar, a former airline pilot.

In the Third District, seven candidates fought for the seat, including Ali Ahmad Naimi, who spent some time in jail after the 1953 dissolution of the Liberal (seventh) Parliament. The surprise winner was Mohammad Yousuf Benish, a liberal mullah, once jailed for his satirical, political tirades.

The five-way race in the Fourth District turned out to be no contest. The winner was Engineer Ghulam Mohammad Farhad (called Papa Ghulam by friend and foe alike), editor of the pro-“Pushhtunist” newspaper, Afghan Mellat (temporarily banned during the elections), and former president of the Afghan Electric Company. He polled more votes than any other candidate in Kabul, an indication of the popularity of his idea of Pushhtun supremacy.

A Sikh, a Hindu, and six Muslims competed in the Fifth District. The seat went to Sardar Jai Singh, a popular Sikh businessman whose family has been in Kabul for several generations.

Minority groups voted in blocs in several Kabul districts: the Mongoloid-looking Hazara Shi‘a and the Qizilbash Shi‘a openly, but without success, tried to elect a Shi‘a from the Second District. The Shi‘a of the Third District, however, were credited with giving Benesh his unexpected victorious edge over the six other candidates there.

The five days of balloting in Kabul were orderly but exciting. Students paraded with placards; cars, taxis, even lorries, ferried voters to and from polls; women, some veiled, others in miniskirts, queued up to vote. As in all democratic elections, there were some irregularities. Since many voters were illiterate, others had to read their names for them from the registration lists, and sometimes a man received the wrong number from the lists of eligible voters posted outside each polling station. Although a candidate or his representatives could challenge a voter’s identity, this was seldom done because it would invite retaliation and many candidates had recruited voters of doubtful qualifications.

In an attempt to reduce bogus voting, the Central Supervisory Election Commission printed two ballots: black for the Senate elections; green for the Lower House. Each ballot was numbered and each voter, after being properly (or perhaps improperly) identified, received a numbered ballot. The voter then proceeded alone into the polling booth. Inside were ballot boxes, one for each candidate. The boxes had photographs of the candidates and their symbols attached to the sides. A total of 75 symbols (spade, pen, locomotive, telephone, rose, etc.) had been approved: no
symbol could include anything from another country’s flag or national seal, thus no candidate could show the hammer and sickle or the eagle. The voter shoved his ballot into the box of the candidate of his choice.

Some men and women were seen to leave the booth with ballots still in their pockets to sell to a candidate or his supporters. A candidate’s man would stuff several such ballots into a box when he voted. Counterfeit ballots appeared, as did forged identity cards. At Surkh Parsa District, Parwan Province, polling station, the count showed that the ballots outnumbered the registered voters by 5 per cent. A new vote was held there on September 29.

Other infractions were reported in the press. Three policemen were arrested on the eve of the September 2 Senate elections as they were placing photographs of one of the candidates on the inside walls of a polling station. They said they had been bribed.

Many in Kabul voted according to ethnic or kinship ties, although most literates were influenced by national issues or voted according to their ideological convictions.

In the countryside, the voting was almost exclusively along ethnic, kin-oriented lines, but with a significant difference from the 1965 elections in that the true power elite emerged from behind its “mud curtain” in greater numbers.

All Afghan Parliaments, from the first (appointed in 1931 by Mohammad Nadir Shah, the present king’s father) through the eleventh were basically rubber-stamp and appointive, with the exception of the “Liberal” seventh. The rural power elite, the khans, begh, boyars, maliks, and mullahs, preferred in that situation to remain as anonymous as possible. They sent their second line of power to Kabul as a first line of defense or simply hired literate Kabulis to promote their interests in the capital. That usually was cheaper than to maintain a separate household in Kabul, and they felt the fewer their direct contacts with the Central Government, the longer they could keep their local power intact.

The second line of power, after setting up shop in Kabul, began to build its own base of power with horizontal links to the government, in addition to the regional, vertical, tribal-kin links. The men of the second line were able to feed brothers, sons, cousins and other relatives into the government bureaucracy, thus strengthening their position in the course of a single generation. Their accretion of power was made easier by the fact that the government demanded children for the school system, and the young offspring of the second line were ready and willing. Many have since attained high positions in the Afghan government.

With the great increase of sustained contact brought about by the rapidly expanding infrastructure after World War II, the khans, who had tried to remain aloof from national politics, found that their influence was being usurped by the men they had sent to Kabul to represent them. As their influence through contact with the government increased, the men of the second line posed a threat to the traditional power elite, particularly since they could arrange patronage appointments for friends and relatives.

Running as candidates in the first free elections of 1965, some of the elite were surprised that their representatives had chosen to run against them. They were even more surprised when, in some instances, the second-stringers made the first team and returned to Kabul as elected wakil.

The 1965 elections also brought out many of the younger educated sons of the second line, some of whom were elected and then re-elected to the thirteenth Parliament in 1969, a record of success particularly apparent among the more conservative ones, running in rural areas.

The 1969 elections brought still more of the power elite into the political arena and a good many of them won office. They are now committed to the parliamentary system, and to closer contact with the government in their tribal areas.

Another interesting pattern developed in the north, among the transplanted Pushtun people. Local leaders among the Uzbak, Tajik, Hazara, and other indigenous groups won seats, thus giving the twelfth and thirteenth Parliaments greater minority representation. The Pushtun, however, continue to control Parliament.
Two basic patterns were apparent in the elections in the rural areas: (1) In non-Pushtun areas of the north, local non-Pushtun leaders stood for election against Pushtuns, and often won; (2) In the Pushtun areas, the first line of power came out to compete with the second line, and often—though not always—won. There were some significant exceptions. For example, in Ghazni Center, a Ghilzai Pushtun stronghold, the people (or rather the few who voted) elected a Hazara to the Wolesi Jirga.

Few urban liberals of the twelfth Parliament survived the 1969 elections. In Kabul, only the leftist Babrak came through, and he so softened his usual hard line that he still faces as much criticism from the chop-i-chop (the far left, or Maoist groups) as from conservative and religious leaders in the Wolesi Jirga.

Some of the campaigns in the hinterland took on a national flavor because they attracted candidates who were known throughout the country. In such contests, the government (that is, the urban power elite and the cabinet) was likely to be popularly referred to as an undefined “they.” “They” support this candidate; ‘they’ don’t want that man elected.”

Perhaps the most important of such contests was in Mqor District of Ghazni Province, where former Prime Minister Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal ran for the Lower House against Mohammad Akram Taraki, a hand-picked government candidate.

The power arrayed against Maiwandwal was formidable, including, as it did, the incumbent Prime Minister Nur Ahmad Etemadi, who has for years been a political opponent of Maiwandwal.

Many in Afghanistan attribute the Etemadi-Maiwandwal feud to the fact that Maiwandwal, while Prime Minister, did two things unacceptable to the establishment: (1) He used all of his power accorded his office under the Constitution. (2) He permitted (according to his opponents) his supporters to create, albeit loosely, a “cult of personality.” With power at his disposal and a growing group of followers, it was logical that Maiwandwal should form a political party.

Although Afghanistan even now has no functioning Political Parties Law, Maiwandwal issued a Manifesto for his Progressive Democratic Party. He first delivered it in the course of a radio address on the night of August 24, 1966. It was printed later in The Kabul Times Annual: 1967, edited by Nour M. Rahimi.

As both his political power and his popularity with the public grew, Maiwandwal suffered a loss of support within his Cabinet. Some Ministers complained that he made decisions alone, instead of first discussing the issues in the Monday meetings of the full Cabinet. Such tensions were resolved when Maiwandwal’s tenure as Prime Minister ended in November 1967. Resigning his office because of ill health, he went to the United States for a major operation. On returning to Afghanistan, he immediately was again involved in politics. His newspaper, the Musawat, became a popular opposition periodical and published many thought-provoking articles prior to the elections, including a socialist-oriented manifesto.

Briefly, what Maiwandwal calls his Progressive Democracy consists of a five-point evolutionary program of belief and action: religion (respect for—if not belief in—Islam and its humanitarian principles); the monarchy (its stabilizing role and continuity are necessary as the democracy develops); democracy (sovereignty for the people, with a functioning parliamentary apparatus to institute legislative programs); nationalism (institutionalized individual political rights and obligations inside an integrated regional economic framework); socialism (land reform with credit safeguards, equitable taxation, nationalization of industry related to agriculture.)

His new manifesto was discussed in a series of four articles in Musawat, appearing on March 5, May 21, June 11, and July 2, 1969. Shortly after the articles were published, the leftist newspaper Parcham reported that Maiwandwal and others in his camp had been arrested. The report proved to be erroneous and many Afghans in Kabul thought that the rumor had been planted to indicate official disapproval of Maiwandwal’s manifesto and of his constant charges that the Etemadi government had failed to act on needed—educational, social, and political reforms.
The inactivity of the Etemadi government was somewhat overplayed by the opposition, for development projects did move ahead, and day-by-day bureaucratic processes ground on. A quiet period may be what the Afghan political scene needed just before the elections, particularly since there were no officially recognized political parties to promote programs and keep party members in line. What opposition groups usually meant by “inactivity” was that they were not part of the action. More responsible members of the opposition insist they simply wish to be allowed to participate in the nation-building processes; they want the chance to present alternatives to the present government’s programs and debate them in the Shura.

In the columns of Musawat, Maiwandwal had issued a blanket invitation to foreign newspapermen to visit Moqor to observe the elections. He made it clear he felt “they” were out to defeat him.

Not a newspaper correspondent but certainly an interested foreigner, I decided to make the three-hour drive from Kabul to Moqor on September 17, the day voting was supposed to start there. During my drive, I saw posters of “approved” candidates posted on the booths of the toll collectors. I also was reminded that the period of late summer-early fall is a good time to call out the Afghan electorate. The wheat has been reaped, the rice will be harvested later. Most nomads have reached their winter quarters, but feuds will not flare up until later in the winter. Future elections may take the edge off feuds by offering a nonviolent outlet in the off-agricultural season. The initial effect of elections, however, has been to intensify feuds, as ethnic groups or factions within groups bring their differences to the ballot box. For example, Pashtun tribesmen (mainly Nurzai and Achekzai Durrani) crossed the Durand Line north of Quetta (West Pakistan) to support their transborder cousins in elections near Qandahar. Because of these confrontations, Spin Boldak District does not have a representative in the Wolesi Jirgah. (Incidentally, a total of 17 Nurzai wakil were elected to the 1969 Wolesi Jirgah.)

Between Ghazni and Moqor, thousands of sheep and a few goats grazed. Nomads kept watch over their flocks by day, and the gendarmarie and police watched the polls. The crops were in, courtyards were filled with piles of dried manure for use as fuel. The plows and wooden drags moved busily through the fields. The chunk-chunk-chunk-sounds of the petrol-operated mills grinding wheat to flour disturbed the pastoral silence.

Qanat (Arabic term used in Persian-speaking areas) specialists (usually Andar Ghilzai Pushhtun) cleaned and repaired the underground canals (called kariz in Pashto). The region is mainly Pushhtun, both farmers and nomads. The air was pleasantly crisp in Moqor. There was little haze to obscure the view. The mountains stood pat.

No posters of Maiwandwal were visible in Moqor; only those of two of his rivals. Originally, 13 candidates had been approved to run in Moqor. Government officials (at “their” insistence) asked all but two of the candidates opposing Maiwandwal to withdraw for the “good of the country.” “They,” it appeared, were afraid that a split vote would elect Maiwandwal. In addition, “they” suspected that seven of the candidates were really Maiwandwal supporters and would withdraw at the last minute and throw their support to him. All but six candidates withdrew under the pressure.

I could find no evidence of an election being held in Moqor so I wandered to the old hotel, now a military headquarters. It was noon and the officers poured out. They paused, astonished at seeing a Westerner. One asked if I was shuravist (Russian). I identified myself as an American professor interested in the elections. The officers said, “No polling here today, but at Janda, 25 miles down the road.” An officer pointed out the direction and I was off. (Reports made their way back to Kabul that a mysterious American was interfering in the Moqor elections; even the American Embassy was mystified).

At Janda, I looked for posters of Maiwandwal and found none; only those of the same two opponents. The polling station was in the local school, which was surrounded by a compound wall. The Taraki and Ali Khel Ghilzai Pushhtun moved in and out to vote. Two women without veils voted. Someone said, “They are from Kabul, but their father is from here.”

Several tense police officers sat under some trees near the polling station, and explained the
presence of two machine guns pointing at the entrance of the polling station as voter protection in the event of an antigovernment (i.e., pro-Maiwandwal) demonstration. Although the guns were covered under white tents, the barrels poked out into the sunlight.

The five candidates other than Maiwandwal had tents, tea and kabab for the voters. Drummers and dancers entertained crowds with the attan, the 'peshawar dance, now becoming known as the national dance.' Only Maiwandwal had no tent or his supporters. Lorrys brought in voters, but Maiwandwal had found it impossible to rent any lorries, because they were all "occupied." ("They" had struck again.) Several lorry drivers informed me that government officials in Ghazni had pressed them to sign statements which guaranteed they would not rent their vehicles to Maiwandwal's followers during the elections. The drivers were threatened with jail if they broke their written word.

A Maiwandli (supporter of Maiwandwal) told me that Maiwandwal and his entourage were lunching near Shinkai. I drove across country to find the former Prime Minister and his party relaxing in the garden of a friend. A large coterie of his local followers stayed close to him to avoid arrest. Seven of his followers were in jail, although others had been recently released after a 24-hour hunger strike by Maiwandwal. The arrests came about when Maiwandis objected to posters being ripped down, or as they tried to bribe lorry drivers to transport voters to the polls.

Several days before the elections began, Maiwandwal arrived in Moqor amid a great reception, well arranged by his advance men. It was Juma (the Muslim day of rest, or Friday), so Maiwandwal went to the local mosque. The mullah introduced him to the congregation and Maiwandwal made a brief speech about his program, giving emphasis to the parliamentary system. He made slight mention of the constitutional monarchy. That night, the gendarmes arrested the mullah (among others) and escorted him to Kabul for questioning. The mullah was subsequently released. Maiwandwal himself went to police headquarters in Moqor and demanded that he be arrested with his followers—or, that they all be released. He then went on the hunger strike until Kabul authorities ordered their release.

Some who had been arrested and released came to Maiwandwal and offered to produce unlimited votes for money. Not knowing who had been pressured or "brainwashed," Maiwandwal claims to have rejected all such suggestions.

Police officials watch who comes and goes, wherever Maiwandwal stays. Several visitors were questioned as they departed. Such moves obviously intimidated some voters. Disquieting rumors also tended to discourage potential or actual supporters. For example, word got out that all voters would be photographed in the booths, where boxes of all six candidates had been lined up. Those photographed putting ballots in Maiwandwal's box would be marked men.

On September 13, Radio Afghanistan announced that a forgery of a Royal Decree was being circulated in support of a certain "leading candidate" in the Moqor election. According to Maiwandwal, this was simply another attempt to smear him. The fact, he said, was that he had written to the Central Supervisory Election Commission, protesting the treatment of some of his followers by the police and local election officials. A secretary of the CSEC, Mohammad Tahir, wrote a letter saying that no one in the government opposed the candidacy of Maiwandwal. Supporters of Maiwandwal had photocopies made to prove to voters that, at least officially, the government did not oppose him. In several copies, someone had changed "Tahir" to "Zahir" by simply adding a dot to the t (b), making it a z (b). An unsophisticated but literate voter might think the altered letter had been signed by His Majesty King Mohammad Zahir Shah, even though it clearly was on the letterhead of the CSEC. The police in Ghazni seized the altered copies and sent them to Kabul, where Radio Afghanistan announced the fact of the forgery. The broadcast may have contributed to Maiwandwal's defeat, although some Afghans insist that the whole pattern of harassment helped rather than hurt his cause.

After interviewing Maiwandwal, I returned to Janda and watched two Maiwandlis put up posters of their candidate. A literate Pushtun read the text to bystanders. Year by year, position by position, the impressive career of Maiwandwal unfolded, the last item being "Prime Minister of Afghanistan, from 1965-1967." The reader paused and added:
Dancers entertain voters at Janda, Moqor District, Ghazni Province. Note hand carried poster of former Prime Minister Maiwandwal (bottom).
"la, bi-chawk, bi-motor" ("Now, without chair, without motor," a reference to a high position in government and the vehicle which goes with it. After the laughter died down, he added, "But, Afghanistan, he is the best man." Several immediately agreed, but most moved along, because the police were taking an interest in our little hering. I moved, too.

Three days before the polling moved to Moqor, they relaxed and did not tie up any of the lorries, apparently feeling that Maiwandwal had been thoroughly beaten. On that day, however, Maiwandwal rented all the lorries they could find and the showing so disturbed the anti-Maiwandwal forces that "they" once again hired the lorries for the final day.

Starting in Moqor on September 19, the polling continued for another five days. Maiwandwal's followers tried unsuccessfully to hire lorries as far as Qandahar. The last day, several lorries from Paktya Province (home of Maiwandwal's mother—again illustrating the strong maternal aspect of Afghan culture!) arrived to help out, for, as they put it, "Honor knows no fear." On the last day of polling, troops blocked off several roads leading into Moqor "for security reasons," after it became obvious that many Maiwandwals were streaming toward the town. To the surprise of none, Mohammad Akram Taraki won handily. (Several government officials in Ghazni were promoted after the election; one officer was decorated.) Official tallies of the election have never been made public, but reliable sources indicate that Akram received 2,234 votes to 1,170 for Maiwandwal. The other four candidates totaled 478 (1,025, 998, 893, 562 respectively). A total of 6,882 out of 15,313 eligibles voted.

One of Maiwandwal's staunchest supporters, Abdul Rauf Benawa, poet and former Minister of Information and Culture in Maiwandwal's Cabinet, fared better after an initial setback. His application for the Wolesi Jirgha was turned down by the Central Supervisory Election Committee, because Benawa had never formally resigned from government service. Benawa pointed out that he had never been known to hold a cabinet member when Maiwandwal resigned, because Article 91 of the 1964 Constitution says: "In the case of resignation of the Prime Minister, the Government ceases to exist after the acceptance of the resignation by the King." Benawa took the matter to the courts, won his case, and went on to win a seat in the Wolesi Jirgha from Musa Qala District, in Hilmand Province.

Another important race occurred in Wardak Province, where Dr. Mohammad Omar Wardak emerged as the victor in a one-sided contest. Until June 24, he had been Minister of the Interior in the Etemadi Cabinet. He resigned to run for the Wolesi Jirgha as an obvious progovernment candidate. Dr. Wardak also served on the Central Supervisory Election Committee until his resignation. Many Afghans questioned the propriety (and even legality) of the Minister of the Interior (who appoints all the governors and subgovernors) running for Parliament. In addition, the election law specifically requires that government officials working in Kabul and wishing to stand for the Shura must resign three months before the election, which, technically, Dr. Wardak did not do. His intended role evolved in the first sessions of the thirteenth Parliament, when, after a stiff fight (he obtained only one-third of the votes cast), he was elected President (Chairman) of the Wolesi Jirgha.

Much money passed hands during the elections. One successful wakil spent 17 lakhs (1 lakh = 100,000 afghans; 80 afghans equaled about $1 at the time); his losing opponent spent 10.5 lakhs. Expenses included: chapans (cloaks) for the tribal elders or village leaders; rent of vehicles to transport voters to the polls; meals and entertainment near the polling stations; posters; publicity; cash money for each voter. Some candidates admit paying each voter as much as 1,000 afghans.

The elections ended, the votes counted and checked, charges and countercharges made, Prime Minister Etemadi officially released the results over Radio Afghanistan. The composition of the Lower House of the thirteenth Parliament remarkably resembles the eleventh, the last rubber-stamp Parliament. Conservative and rubber-stamp it may appear, but in essence, the Wolesi Jirgha to date has continued the "do-nothing" patterns of the twelfth.12

[Photographs on page 3 courtesy Nancy Hatch Dupree; all other photographs courtesy Louis Dupree]
NOTES


5. For details of buzkashi, see Louis Dupree, Sports and Games in Afghanistan [LD-1-'70], Fieldstaff Reports, South Asia Series, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1970.


7. Pertinent Title IV Articles are as follows:

Article 43:
Members of the Wolesi Jirgah (House of the People) shall be elected by the people of Afghanistan in a free, universal, secret and direct election, in accordance with the provisions of the law. For this purpose Afghanistan shall be divided into electoral constituencies, the number and limits of which are fixed by the law. Each constituency shall return one member. The candidate who obtains the largest number of votes cast in his constituency, in accordance with the provisions of the law, shall be recognized as the representative of that constituency.

Article 44:
Members of the Wolesi Jirgah (House of the People) shall be elected for a period of four years, which is one term of the legislature. Whenever the Shura (Parliament) is dissolved, in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, a new Wolesi Jirgah (House of the People) shall be elected for another legislative term. However, the termination date of the outgoing House is so regulated that the ensuing session of the Wolesi Jirgah (House of the People) commences on the date stipulated in Article 59.

Article 45:
Members of the Meshrano Jirgah (House of the Elders) shall be nominated and elected as follows:

1. One-third of the members shall be appointed by the King for a period of five years from amongst well-informed and experienced persons.

2. The remaining two-thirds of the members shall be elected as follows:
   a. Each Provincial Council shall elect one of its members to the Meshrano Jirgah (House of the Elders) for a period of three years.
   b. The residents of each province shall elect one person for a period of four years by a free, universal, secret and direct election.

8. The first 11 Parliaments were elected ("appointed" is a more appropriate term) under the provisions of the 1931 Constitution; the twelfth was the first elected under the 1964 Constitution. The first Parliament was appointed in 1930 to write a constitution, and legitimize the throne for the present ruling family.

9. Final election schedule, Meshrano Jirgah: held in Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat cities September 3-7; rest of country, August 26-September 2.

Wolesi Jirgah: September 10-24 (in Kabul, September 10-14). Several reasons account for the staggering of the dates: the limited number of even partly qualified election officials had to travel, round robin, from polling station to polling station; even the total number of ballot boxes was limited. Some extensions were given because of irregularities (i.e., stuffed ballot boxes) and death of candidates (i.e., Abdul Qayoum, incumbent from Faizabad, Badakhshan Province, was killed, along with four others, when a busload of 33 of his followers plunged hundreds of feet into the Kokcha River on September 15). Another accident, however, failed to hold up the scheduled elections.
Mohammedullah Kazemi (who resigned as President of Accounting, Ministry of Finance, to stand as a candidate for wakil from Laghman Province) received a compound leg fracture and other injuries when his campaign car was rammed head-on on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway early in the campaign. Kazemi left the hospital in a hired ambulance in order to prove to his followers he still lived. In spite of his heroic—and often painful—efforts, Kazemi lost to a government-approved candidate.

