



HEKMAT, REŽĀ SARDĀR FĀKER

HEKMAT (Ḥekmat), **REŽĀ SARDĀR FĀKER**, politician and the powerful speaker of the House of Representatives (Majles; b. Tehran, ca. 1308/1891; d. Tehran, 1356 Š./1978; [Figure 1](#)). He was born to Ḥājj Ḥesām-al-Din Širāzi of a wealthy family of Shiraz, where his paternal family had a reputation as physicians and scholars (Ḥekmat, 2000, pp. 18-19).

Early years. Hekmat received his elementary education at the 'Elmiya School (q.v.) in Tehran, where a number of prominent men of letters, including Ḍokā'-al-Molk Mo-ḥammad-'Ali Foruḡi and Mirzā 'Abd-al-'Azim Qarib were teaching (Ḥekmat, 2000, p. 21). He lost his father at age fifteen and by necessity moved to Shiraz and took control of the family's vast land holdings (Ḥekmat, 2000, p. 2) and became actively involved in politics. When Ḥaydar Khan 'Am(u)oḡli traveled to Shiraz to start a new chapter of the Democratic Party, the young Hekmat joined him and became a founding member of the party's local chapter (Ḥekmat, 2000, p. 2). Ahmad Shah soon gave Hekmat the title of Fāker-al-Salṭana and soon thereafter he changed his name to Sardār Fāker Hekmat (Ḥekmat, 2000, p. 2).

Hekmat was a staunch critic of the infamous 1919 agreement between Persia and Britain and joined forces with the anti-British Tangestāni movement. Because of these activities, 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Mirzā Farmānfarmā (q.v.), the powerful governor of Fārs, confiscated Ḥekmat's properties. By the end of



1919 he was forced into exile and spent the next year traveling in Europe. He returned in June 1920, when he was in favor, particularly with the prime minister Mirzā Ḥasan Khan Mošir-al-Dawla. Mošir-al-Dawla sent Hekmat on an important mission to negotiate with Mirzā Kuček Khan, the leader of Jangli movement. In his memoirs of those days, Hekmat claims that he was instrumental in convincing Mir-zā Kuček Khan to sever his ties with the Communists (Ḥekmat, 1996, p. 112; idem, 1920). While many independent sources confirm Ḥekmat's important role in these negotiations, some scholars have suggested that by the time Hekmat came to meet Mirzā Kuček Khan, the estrangement between him and his erstwhile Communist allies was already a fact (Chaquerie, pp. 234-36). Still other sources indicate that it was Mirzā Kuček Khan's decision to agree to a meeting with Hekmat that triggered the separation (Sabahi, pp. 97, 100). Not long after these negotiations, Hekmat was elected to the Majlis and thus began his years of service as a legislator.

Legislative years. Hekmat seemed to have found his calling in the parliament. No sooner had he joined than he developed a great affinity for the institution and his own position in it. He served in the Majlis in some of the most important sessions in its history. He was first elected to the fourth session, and was reelected to the fifth, seventh, eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth sessions as well. During the reign of Reza Shah, aside from serving two terms in the Majlis, Hekmat was also appointed to the governorships of Gorgān, Kermān, and Yazd (Şafari, pp. 670-71). His reputation was marred when, in 1932, Ḥasan Mostawfi-al-Mamālek died while a guest in his house. Rumors of foul play began to abate only when he published a letter by the son of the deceased, testifying that his father had died of natural causes.

Hekmat's most significant role in Persian politics belongs to the years when he was the speaker of the fifteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth, and twentieth sessions of the Majlis. In those days the parliament was a key player in the tumultuous arena of Persian politics, and Hekmat, as its speaker, played an important role in shaping the policies of that institution. He was, for example, instrumental in the passage of a law designed to purge the government of corrupt officials. When his own name appeared on the infamous "J-list" (*band-e jim*) of employees to be investigated, he first gave a tearful lecture in his own defense and then managed to kill the bill and annul its effects (Şafari, I, pp. 345-47).

Hekmat often maintained a semblance of independence from the warring factions of Persian politics. Then he joined prime minister Aḥmad Qawām



(Qawām-al-Salṭana) to found the Democratic Party of Iran (*Hezb-e demokrāt-e Irān*); and indeed he owed his position as the speaker of the Majles to the support of the party affiliates, who held the majority (Şafari, I, p. 185). When discord appeared between the court and Qawām, Hekmat became the advocate of the court against Qawām and Moḥammad Moşaddeq, the shah's two main nemeses of those days (Āqeli, pp. 580-82). The Qawām cabinet fell in 1946, and the Majlis picked Hekmat as the successor (Safari, I, p. 259). Hekmat agreed to serve, and a royal decree was issued in his name, making him the fifty-fourth prime minister of modern Persia. He soon developed second thoughts and made his acceptance of the highly volatile and insecure job of prime minister predicated on the condition that, once his cabinet fell, he would be allowed to resume his seat in the parliament. When his demand, which ran against the letter of the law, was rejected, he declined the appointment, having been a prime minister for only forty-eight hours (Āqeli, pp. 582-83). Though Hekmat's colleagues at the time occasionally criticized him for leaking the secret deliberations of the Majlis to the Shah, and though they accused him of making the parliament submissive to the whims and wishes of the monarch (Kalāli, pp.70-72; Şafari, I, p. 274), he was nevertheless arguably the last speaker of the Majlis who had any semblance of real power.

In 1957, in keeping with the new spirit of creating docile political parties in the country, Hekmat founded the Socialist Party of Iran, only to see it flounder rather quickly (Safari, II, p. 272). In the early sixties, Hekmat's power, along with that of the Majlis itself, had begun to wane. He was at least partially involved in the fall of the Ja'far Şarif Emāmi cabinet in 1961, when, to the latter's anger and consternation, he supported the demands of the striking teachers for higher pay (Şarif Emāmi, pp. 238-40). His final demise came when he participated in a meeting at the invitation of Ḥosayn 'Alā', then minister of court. 'Alā', concerned that excessive force had been used to quell the urban riots of June 1963 by supporters of Ayatollah Komeyni, convened a consultative meeting of some elder statesmen of Iranian politics, including Hekmat. When the shah heard of the gathering, and their suggestions about seeking some conciliation with the opposition, he was not pleased. All who had participated, with the exception of Şarif Emāmi, lost their jobs (United States Department of State, pp. 610-12). Hekmat was never allowed to run for Majlis again and thus spent the last years of his life out of the political limelight.

Personal traits. Hekmat was a man of obdurate, aristocratic demeanor. He was educated more in the world of realpolitik than in academia. He always spent



more money that he earned, and thus by the end of his life he had squandered the vast fortune he had inherited. He loved gambling, particularly a game of poker, and during the post-war period, when the Majlis was the center of gravity in Persian politics, Hekmat's gambling habit and his tendency to lose vast sums of money became the subject of political controversy and constant taunts by his opponents (Şafari, I, p. 353). When he moved against Qawām, his erstwhile patron, and joined the ranks of the allies of the shah, many in Tehran, including the British embassy, believed that the change had come about when the shah agreed to pay his large, unpaid gambling debt (Azimi, p. 176). Hekmat was also known for his generosity and his willingness to help others in need. The British embassy in Tehran described him as “a corpulent and polite man, very hospitable, but a man of curious friends” (Foreign Office of Britain, p. 25). In the last years of his life, he was beleaguered by numerous health problems, forcing him to travel repeatedly to European health clinics. He suffered a stroke and died in his own house at the end of a long night's lavish party.

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