



# TOWFIQ (TAWFIQ) NEWSPAPER

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**TOWFIQ (TAWFIQ) NEWSPAPER**, a satirical and political weekly newspaper, which was published in Tehran for almost fifty years from 1923 until 1971. *Towfiq* underwent three discontinuous periods: the first was from 1923 to 1940, which ended with the death of its founder, Ḥosayn Towfiq, who died soon after being released from his second imprisonment on 29 Bahman 1318/19 Feb. 1940; his imprisonment was on the spying charges leveled at him by the Office of Politics (Edāra-ye siāsi). In the second period, his son Moḥammad-ʿAli Towfiq took the editorship until the [coup d'état of 1953](#), when the office of *Towfiq* and its editor's house were looted and burned down by a mob (Asadipur, p. 2969); the third period began on 20 March 1958 when the journal was published first under the name of *Fokāhi* (humorous) and later as *Towfiq* by the founder's nephews, Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, and ʿAbbās, continuing in spite of numerous interruptions until 1971, when it was closed down by the censorship agency (Asadipur, p. 2969; Farida Tawfiq, pp. 190, 203-57; see also [censorship](#)).

Its founder and first editor, Ḥosayn Towfiq (b. Tehran 14 Mehr 1258/6 October 1879) spent more than half of his life in journalism and literary activities. He was the editor of the humorous and satirical biweekly journal *Gol-e zard* for four years (1917-21), but in 1923 he started on his own and published *Towfiq*.

Originally, *Towfiq* was a humorous and satirical journal published in four pages. In the fifth year of its publication it obtained permission to print



cartoons. Ḥosayn Towfiq, in his first editorial, defined its aim as “supporting good and pious people and edification of the third class to defend their rights” (Miranşāri, 2013, p. 278). This humorous and mildly satirical phase discontinued from the beginning of 1932 until the early spring of 1938 because of the dictatorial regime of Reżā Shah (r. 1925-41), and it became a literary journal. In the last phase of the first period *Towfiq* became a non-political satirical weekly again (1317/1938) and continued until the death of its founder in 1939 and the resumption of its editorship by his son Moḥammad-‘Ali Towfiq in 1940, when the second period of publication began (Şadr Hāşemi, II, p. 147).

The change to a more satirical and humorous weekly came at the beginning of 1938 with emphasis on “moral points” and on “social and family matters.” According to [Abu’l-Qāsem Hālat](#), who later became a major contributor to *Towfiq* and sometimes served as its editor, it was ‘Ali Daşti, the head of the Office of Newspaper Oversight (variously referred to as *Edāra-ye sānsor-e maṭbu‘āt*, *Edāra-ye rāhnemā-ye ruznāma-negāri*; see Qāsemi, 2009, p. 272) who had torn and thrown away an issue of *Towfiq* and had suggested that it be turned into a real humorous (*Fokāhi*) paper. Ḥosayn Towfiq, with the help of Hālat, attracted some of the contributors of an already banned satirical journal, *Omid*, poets such as ‘Abbās Forāt (1894-1968), Gōlām-Reżā Ruḥāni (1897-1985), Aḥmad Soruri, [Rahi Mo‘ayyeri](#) (1909-68), and many others (Qāsemi, 2009, p. 275; Miranşāri, p. 279). *Omid* was a satirical weekly that had been closed down by the government a few years earlier and Ḥosayn Towfiq was one of its contributors (for *Omid*, see Şadr Hāşemi, I, pp. 277-81). Another poet satirist who makes a similar statement was [Moḥammad-‘Ali Afrāšta](#) (1287-1338/1908-59), a well-known satirist journalist and one of the writers of *Omid*. Afrāšta states in his memoirs that Ḥosayn Towfiq came to him and asked his help to turn *Towfiq* into a humorous paper. This was upon the suggestion of an influential and newly returned minister from Europe who had noticed the absence of a humorous journal among Iranian papers. According to Afrāšta, the government was suspicious of Moḥammad Eteḥād, the owner and editor of *Omid*, and considered Ḥosayn Towfiq more suitable since he was apolitical. Afrāšta continued his cooperation with *Towfiq* until 1946 (Afrāšta, pp. 24-25).

The abdication of Reżā Shah in September 1941 and the following period of freedom of press was a turning point in the life of *Towfiq*. Şadr Hāşemi (II, p. 145) writes: “As various political parties sprang to life after September 1941, *Towfiq* became one of the leftist newspapers and one of the most interesting



and most widely read weeklies of Tehran. In this period it abandoned its old flattering style and began criticizing political affairs and the government in a most vehement manner. Though banned several times by the police, it did not forsake its new policy. In brief, *Towfiq* became a totally political and satirical journal in the real sense of the term after 1941, and this was by no means comparable to its past.”

It is true that during almost twelve years of the second period of publication *Towfiq* became very political, but it was in 1945, in the advent of the Azarbaijan political crisis ([Azarbaijan v](#)), that it became left leaning and favored the policies of the Tudeh Party. This was mostly because of writers such as Afrāšta, Parviz Kaṭibi, Moḥammad-Amin Moḥammadi, ‘Ali Miṭāqi (M. M. Sangsari), and a few others. Six days after the downfall of Ja‘far Pišavari (premier of Autonomous Government of Azarbaijan) *Towfiq* published a cartoon of him, clearly indicating that it had changed its leftist views (issue of 18 Dec. 1946). In the following years, prior to the nationalization of oil and the Mosaddeq period, *Towfiq* passionately defended Mosaddeq’s foreign policies. Even in December 1952, because of criticism of Ḥājjī-‘Ali Razmārā’s government, it was closed down for two months and the paper was published under the name of “Bābā Ādam” (Şalāhi, pp. 65-66; ‘Abbās Towfiq, 1998, pp. 5-10).

In spite of this period of relative freedom of the press (1941-53), *Towfiq* was banned several times and Moḥammad-‘Ali Towfiq was arrested, the first time because of a cartoon criticizing the Allies’ occupation of Iran in November 1941.

Mostly in the third period of its publication, *Towfiq* criticized various cabinet members and prime ministers. One of the targets of satire for *Towfiq* was the actions of various members of parliament who were referred to by comical names such as Āmirzā, Fesenjun, Bādemjun, Os ‘Abbās, etc. Although some of the cartoons or comments landed the editors in the prison, it was not for long time. For instance, the criticism of ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Hażir, the prime minister in 1948 (*Towfiq* 26, no. 32, Tir 9, 1327 Ş/June 30, 1948) caused Moḥammad-‘Ali Towfiq to be jailed for two weeks (Qodsizād, p. 557).

It should also be noted that, in several cartoons of the period shortly before the coup d’état of 1953, Moḥammad-Rezā Shah is depicted rather negatively. For instance, on the cover of the issue dated 20 Farvardin 1332/9 April 1953, the shah and Dr. Mosaddeq (Dr. Şadaqa) are depicted having dinner. The shah



(depicted as a cat) does not want to share any of the main dish (i.e., the government) with Dr. Şadaqa. The text of the cartoon reads: “You eat it all and I only may look!” In one of his early daring cartoons (16 April 1953), ‘Abbās Towfiq depicts the shah as a locust who is caught by a man (the Iranian nation) after two failed attempts to catch it. The man quotes a Persian proverb meaning “I’ll get you at the end” (*Yak bār jasi malaḳak, dobār jasti malaḳak, āḳer bedasti malaḳak*). The two earlier attempts against Dr. Moşaddeq (Mossadeq) are given as 30 Tir 1330 (22 July 1951) and 9 Esfand 1331 (28 February 1953). An exceptionally harsh criticism of the shah appeared in an editorial entitled “The Black Calamity” (“Fetna-ye siāh”; *Towfiq* 31, no. 35, July 23, 1953). After the paper’s office as well as Moḥammad-‘Ali Towfiq’s house were burned down, he was sent to Falk-al-Aflāk prison in [Khorramabad](#) and later on banished to [Kharg island](#) in the Persian Gulf. He was freed after one year but was not allowed to write in any newspaper. The suspension of *Towfiq* lasted four years and seven months (Ḥālat, p. 251; Asadipur, 20, p. 2969).

Although compared to the leftist satirical weekly *Ālangar*, ideologically *Towfiq* was not a leftist periodical; because of its criticism of the government and its progressive views in 1950 during the government of Prime Minister Razmārā, it was listed among “leftist-leaning” weeklies and considered for suspension (Edāra-ye koll-e āršiv, pp. 72-74). In its last years of second period, *Towfiq* continued passionately to defend liberal causes such as nationalization of the oil and fishery industries. Social issues such as unemployment, high prices, and disregard of many government organizations to the needs of the people were topics often discussed with a pungent wit. Americans, but mostly the British, were also dealt with during the period of nationalization of the oil. This coincided with the thirty years of publication of *Towfiq*, hence parodying Ferdowsi’s remark on thirty years of work on the *Šāh-nāma*, it wrote:

*Basi ranj bordam dar in sāl-si,  
Ke birun konam wāreṭ-e D’Arcy.  
Thirty years of suffering was my share;  
In order to kick out D’Arcy’s heir.*

In the beginning of the third period of its publication, because of harsh censorship, criticism was somewhat subdued in many areas. In the first editorial of this period (29 Esfand 1336/20 March 1958) the reader is made to understand that, under the ongoing circumstances, not everything could be



written, stating: “*Towfiq* is an independent and national newspaper without affiliation to any group or party.” This sentence was printed at the cover of every issue ever after. Furthermore, a comical party called *Hezb-e Qarān* (Party of Donkeys) was created, using Sa’di’s poem as its motto:

*Gāvān-o qarān-e bārbardār,*  
*Beh z-ādamiān-e mardomāzār.*  
 Oxen and donkeys that carry loads,  
 Are better than people who torment their fellows.

Thus, by being a member of *Hezb-e Qarān*, *Towfiq* disassociated itself from other political parties and associations.

This Party of Donkeys was like a real political party with members, gatherings, and “green” membership cards. Satirical comments by its members were printed in *Towfiq*. Furthermore, there was a supplementary “*Qar-nāma*,” which was always published with the paper (Şalāhi, no. 3, p. 72). In international affairs, *Towfiq* was a defender of the weak. During the Vietnam War, the United States, and in the Palestine-Israel conflict, Israel, were satirized in many cartoons as well as in poems and articles. Mas’ud Barzin (p. 118) describes it as “The most serious paper in the garb of satires.”

Harking back to earlier satirical weeklies like *Mollā Naşr-al-Din*, *Āzarbāyjān*, or *Bohlul*, each of which had its own main character, *Towfiq* chose *Kākā*, a black character who usually comes at Nowruz as *Hāji Firuz* or appears in the popular live theatrical performance called *ruhowzi*. Here he was called *Kākā Towfiq*. The other main characters were his wife *Geşinz Qānom*, his monkey *Mamuli*, and *Mellat* (the people). All the editorials were written by *Kākā Towfiq*, who was either *Hasan Towfiq* or ‘*Abbās Towfiq*. Numerous writers who wrote for the paper in different times each had his own humorous pen-name, like ‘*Abbās Towfiq* as *Qāla Suska*, *Kayumarṭ Şāberi* as *Mirzā Gol*, *Mortazā Farajiān* as *Fingili*, *Manučehr Eḥterāmi* as *Pesar-Qāla*, *Abu’l-Qāsem Hālat* as *Qorus-e Lāri*, *Hādi Qorsandi* as *Labkoloft*, *Bijan Asadipur* as *Barg-e Čoğondar*, ‘*Omrān Şalāhi* as *Bača-ye Jawādia*, *Abu Torāb Jali* as *Mozāhem*, etc. On the contrary, the cartoonists of the paper, signed their own names like *Hasan* and ‘*Abbās Towfiq*, *Golām-‘Ali Laṭifi*, *Kāmbiz Derambaqş*, *Iraj Zāre*, and *Nāşer Pākşir*.

Obviously cartoons, especially the color cartoons of the front-page, were a

significant and often a sensational feature of *Towfiq*. From about 1946 until 28 May 1970, with the exception of one issue (16 May 1963), the front-page cartoons were drawn by Ḥasan Towfiq (Farida Towfiq, p. 157). There were also other cartoonists who began their work in *Towfiq* and grew to eminence in due course. The most prominent among them were Aḥmad Saḳāvarz (b. 1944) Nāṣer Pākšīr (b. 1939), Kāmbiz Derambaḳš (b. 1942) and Ġolām-‘Ali Laṭīfi (b. 1934). Although some have said that *Towfiq* was a training school for these artists, Saḳāvarz says that there was a tradition in *Towfiq* to keep a uniformity of style and thus the artistic ingenuity was curtailed. According to him, there was much more artistic freedom in *Čalangar* and *Āhangar* (Saḳāvarz in *Šahrvand*).

The cartoonists of *Towfiq* did not always pass the approval of the censors. For instance, when Asad-Allāh ‘Alam became the prime minister, *Towfiq* drew him riding on the back of the people with a “Mardom” (people) tag on his jacket since he was the head of one of the two official parties, “Mardom.” The caption read: “The government of the people over the people.” The cartoon did not meet the approval of the censors. *Towfiq* changed the picture of Prime Minister ‘Alam into a mourning banner (*‘alam*) and wrote the word *‘alam* on it. Wordplay often played an important part in the satirical methods of *Towfiq*; for instance, see the figure with the title “A Farewell to arms” (*Wedā’ bā aslaḥa*) [FIGURE 1].

In 1964, a number of satirists including Manučehr Maḥjubi, Hādi Ḳorsandi, Bahman Reżā’i and Ġolām-‘Ali Laṭīfi left *Towfiq* or, according some sources, were expelled (Asadipur, p. 2969). They published a new satirical paper called “*Kaškiyāt*,” which was a supplement to *Tehrān moṣawwar* magazine, but it did not last very long.

For almost a decade, *Towfiq* remained unrivalled in the field of satirical weeklies with an average 30,000 copies each edition, “but special issues sold as many as one hundred thousand, a staggering number in Iran at that time” (Milani, 2008, I p. 407). Relative opening up of political atmosphere in the premiership of ‘Ali Amini (1961-62) prompted *Towfiq* to get more involved in politics. Satirizing the prime ministers became a favorite activity. Despite its occasional closures, this practice continued until 1971, when Prime Minister Amir-Abbas Hoveyda decided to diminish its popularity by issuing a license for the journal *Caricature* to Mohsen Dawallu and supported it finically (Behzādi, III, p. 342). Although a number of *Towfiq*’s satirists were drawn to the newly established journal, the popularity of *Towfiq* was not diminished,



and Hoveyda illegally orders its closure in June 1971 (Asadipur, pp. 2969, 3033, 3069). Protesting this “unlawful” closure, *Towfiq* wrote numerous letters to the Ministry of Interior and the police but of no avail, and the documents acquired by *Towfiq* do not state a specific reason for the closure (Farida Tawfiq, pp. 196, 211-21). According to Farida Tawfiq, it was even suggested that a partnership with the government be made with 51 percent of shares for the government. *Towfiq*, in its usual humor, answered: “We are going to form a partnership with Ḥaẓrat Abu’l-Faẓl.” Abu’l-Faẓl ‘Abbās, one of the sons of Imam ‘Ali, is traditionally known for his truthfulness. Seeking his help in a business, people would pledge to spend half of the profit on charity in his name, hence partnership with Ḥaẓrat ‘Abbās (Farida Tawfiq, p. 230). Gradually all fourteen publications associated with *Towfiq*, such as monthly *Towfiq*, its year book, *Ālbum-e Towfiq*, etc., were closed down and its printing house was ceased on 6 May 1972.

According to the Iranian press law, if a periodical is not published for one year its license can be revoked. To try to forestall this eventuality, the editors of *Towfiq* secretly published a few issues and sent them by registered mail to the authorities. Asad-Allāh ‘Alam, in his *Diaries* (II, p. 223) on 1 May 1972, reports that the Moḥammad-Reẓā Shah was angered by these secret editions, and ‘Alam said that closure of *Towfiq* was because of “its editors’ relations with...” Unfortunately, the editor of the *Diaries* has left out the name of this person. Upon an inquiry made from ‘Ali-Naqi Āliḳāni, the editor of the *Diaries*, about this omission, it was found out that it was Šuravi (the Soviet Union).” Āliḳāni, considering that it was improbable that at that time a prominent Iranian could have relations with the Soviet Union, omitted it (Personal communication, July 2016). On 26 August 1972, the head of the Press Office, ‘Aṭā’-Allāh Tadayyon, wrote to Ḥasan Towfiq: “Since the weekly *Towfiq* has not been published for the last one year, its license is being cancelled” (Farida Towfiq, p. 27).

In the third period of its publication, although the journal kept away from touching the shah or royal family, it nevertheless was banned permanently in 1971. Milani says that it is hard to imagine that a popular and influential paper like *Towfiq* could have been closed without the order of the shah (Milani, 1991, p. 335). Yet Ḥosayn Towfiq, in an interview given to the *Great Encyclopaedia of Islam*, downplays the involvement of the shah and considers the main reason for the closure of *Towfiq* was its “not being in agreement with policies of the government and the ever-increasing criticism of it” (Miranṣāri, p. 376). In 1998, a high-ranking SAVAK agent (probably Parviz Tābeti) told



Milani that the reason for its closure was a cartoon displaying Iran as a graveyard with wandering ghosts hovering above it (Milani, 1991, p. 335), but ‘Abbās Towfiq denies this (private correspondence with ‘Abbās Towfiq, 14 Oct. 2016).

*Towfiq* was one of the most influential satirical weeklies of Iran and has been praised by many prominent Iranians. In a letter to its editor, Dr. Moşaddeq wrote from Aḥmadābād, “I have been under house arrest for more than ten years and I have nothing to do but reading papers. *Towfiq* is one the best of them and I have benefitted greatly from it” (Farida Towfiq, p. 278).

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