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THE TURKISH NATIONALIST MOVEMENT ITS IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND

CLARENCE RICHARD JOHNSON

Formerly Professor of Sociology, Robert College, Constantinople

STUDENTS of social phenomena, those who for years have had an intimate knowledge of Turkish life as well as those to whom it has meant little more than harems behind intriguing latticed windows, have been amazed that a so-called backward country, the home of "The Sick Man of Europe," a country which had been stigmatized by western Christians as "incapable of progress," has brought about changes that have startled the whole world. It would seem that nations, like individuals, "may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things." Before discussing in a subsequent paper some of these changes in the folkways of a people, long bound by "the cake of custom," under the magnetic leadership of Mustafa Kemal, it is important to consider in outline some of the aspects of the immediate background of this dynamic movement. This article might be considered a study in national crisis.

The Great War itself, with the dramatic entry of Turkey on the side of Germany, with its varied fortunes including the heroic repulse of the Allies at the Dardanelles which surprised alike friend and foe, represented of course a series of crises for Turkey as for other nations. Then came the end of the war.

Turkey, with Germany and her allies, was defeated, but the Fourteen Points of Wilson became a beacon light in the darkness.¹ A Wilsonian League was formed by writers, publicists, and lawyers in Istamboul, and, in the words

¹ For an interesting discussion, cf. Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, Constable & Co., Ltd., London, 1922, pp. 327 ff.

of a brilliant Turkish leader: "In the midst of blind hatred and the cry of 'no quarter to the defeated,' the only gleam of justice and common sense seemed to come from those principles."²

Then came a triple crisis in three significant events, each of which contributed to an overwhelming crisis for Turkey. The first of these occurred soon after the occupation by the Allies of Constantinople in the autumn of 1918 and the subsequent disillusionment with regard to the moral superiority of the Allies. Next came the occupation of the Turkish port of Smyrna, May 15, 1919, by the Greeks, whom to the Turks were the most despised of the allied nations. The third was the Treaty of Sèvres which virtually meant the destruction of the Ottoman Empire.

1. Constantinople, or Istamboul (the Turkish name for it), a capital bordering on both Europe and Asia, long known as the Queen City because of its surpassing beauty and bountiful harbor and lovingly called by the Turks "Der Saadet" (The Gate of Happiness), or "Der Aliye" (The Sublime Gate), was occupied soon after the armistice was signed between the Turks and Allies in Mudros on board the Agamemnon, October 30, 1918. The entente forces entered the city with great display, sailing with formality into the harbor and up the Bosphorus. The fleet was led by four warships abreast and was convoyed by shining aeroplanes. This was the first time that the Turks' beloved capital with its hundreds of mosques and towering minarets had been in the hands of aliens since its capture by Mohammed the Conqueror in 1453. "The new mas-

² Wilson's 12th Point will be recalled: "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees."

ters came in the spirit of a conquering army and on very short notice requisitioned the Turkish homes of the best families.”³ When the allied armies entered the city the insolence of Greek and Armenian inhabitants toward peaceful Turkish neighbors became decidedly noticeable, for many of the Greeks and Armenians felt the Allies would at last redeem their wrongs, either real or imaginary. I was in Constantinople during the occupation of the Allies and my Turkish friends spoke frankly of how disappointed they were and of how deeply they resented the insolence and arrogance to which they were subjected on all sides. Rumor was rampant and it was said that the black French soldiers from Senegal had become so uncontrollable that they bit the Turkish women in public and roasted Turkish babies for supper. Turkish officers expressed profound surprise at the attitude of the Allies and at the disorder allowed by the regular allied forces. In the significant volume, *The Turkish Ordeal*,⁴ written by the first Turkish graduate of Constantinople College for Women, the first Turkish woman to be invited to speak at the Williamstown Institute of Politics, a lecturer of marked ability and a discriminating writer, one reads:

Large numbers of Turks were continually arrested on some pretext, fined, and sometimes badly beaten at the Allied headquarters. The requisition of the houses, the throwing out of the inhabitants without allowing them to take their personal belongings—those were the mildest forms of bad treatment. The Greek and Armenian interpreters and assistants of the Allied police—the English particularly—greatly influenced and colored the behavior of these men toward the Turks. Apart from the unjust as well as the unwise policy of the Allies toward Turkey, their armies of occupation in the

³ Mary Mills Patrick, *Under Five Sultans*, The Century Co., New York, 1929, p. 329.

⁴ Any student interested in making a thorough study of the Turkish Nationalist Movement would do well to read this volume by Halidé Edib, published by the Century Co., New York, 1928.

first months saw the Turks with the eyes of the Greeks and the Armenians, and perhaps this was what hurt the man in the street most at the time. One often saw Turkish women roughly pushed out of the tramcars, and heard Turkish children called "bloody cusses." The tearing of the fezzes or the tearing of the veils of women were common sights, and all these things were borne with admirable dignity and silence by the townspeople. Let it be added that the Turk forgets and forgives wrongs and even massacres, but he rarely forgets an insult to his self-respect.⁵

Moreover, the Allies felt it important to muzzle the Turkish press. Likewise, it was deemed necessary to silence the foremost members of the Unionist Party, opposed to the Sultan's program of subservience to Great Britain, and they were transported speedily to Malta on a battleship. Some of the prominent Turkish patriots who escaped in disguise were under a sentence of death if captured. The Turkish Parliament was closed and it was rumored that Parliament might never be reopened.

2. Then on the fatal 15th of May, 1919, as a forecast of the kind of peace to be dictated by the victors, the Greek Army was landed in the Turkish port of Smyrna, the most important harbor in Asia Minor, important to the peasants of Anatolia for the exportation of their produce and for the import of farm machinery and other manufactures of the west. These Greek troops were sent to Smyrna with a mandate from the Supreme Council. Their landing which was technically camouflaged as a movement of Allied troops for the maintenance of order was not in accord with either the letter or the spirit of the Armistice, for no previous local disorder had been proved. Regarding this stupendous blunder of the statesmanship of Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, a keen observer of social interaction in the Near East says:

⁵ Halidé Edib, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

The (Sublime) Porte was informed that Allied troops were to be landed at Smyrna for the maintenance of order. An Allied naval squadron left the Bosphorus for Smyrna, with Admiral Calthorpe, the British High Commissioner, in command. The local Allied control-officers were instructed to disarm and remove Turkish troops remaining in the city, in accordance with Articles 5 and 20 of the armistice. In the act of compliance, the Turkish authorities were troubled by a rumor. The troops that were to be landed next day were Greek! They made urgent inquiries from the control-officers, and were simply informed that the troops would be "Allied," as announced already. The answer, technically correct, was of course a deplorable prevarication. The Greek troops went on shore, under the guns of the Allied warships, the following morning.⁶

On this momentous day in May, Allied warships were present in the harbor of Smyrna to give their moral support to the army of occupation. Greek military detachments were sent to escort the Turkish governor and other officials, as well as soldiers and their officers to the quay. Their fezzes and uniforms were torn and under the threat of bayonets they were made to cry "Zito Venizelos!" (Long live Venizelos,—the Premier of Greece). A few hundred Turks amid the jeers and applause of onlookers were "bayoneted, torn, spat on, and tortured by the Greek soldiers or the native Christians," dying on the quay within view of the Allied warships, and the rest were sent to prisons in Smyrna or taken away on Greek warships. At the same time that prominent Turks were being tortured to death on the quay, Greek soldiers and some of the native Christians (meaning Armenians and Greeks in contrast to Mohammedans, but frequently Christian in name only and not in spirit or in deed) were entering Turkish houses in back streets, robbing and killing the men and violating the women.⁷

⁶ Arnold Toynbee, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

⁷ Halidé Edib, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.

The reaction of a Turkish patriot to the occupation of Smyrna showing the devotion to a cause which later was characteristic of the Turkish nation in its fight for independence is seen in these words:

After I learned about the details of the Smyrna occupation I did not speak much. In fact, I hardly opened my mouth on any subject except when it concerned the sacred struggle which was to be. Turkey was to be cleared of murderers, the so-called civilizing Greek army. What we wanted was very simple and it did not matter how and when we got it. Every detail of the coming struggle was of the utmost importance and worth any sacrifice we were willing to make. And we were willing.

Nothing mattered to me from that moment to the time of the extraordinary march to Smyrna in 1922. I suddenly ceased to exist as an individual: I worked, wrote, and lived as a unit of that magnificent national madness.⁸

A significant result of the Smyrna occupation was one of the great protest meetings of modern times when there gathered in the Turkish capital a vast throng estimated at 200,000. The meeting was held in the vicinity of the Hippodrome where exactly 566 years and ten days before, Mohammed the Conqueror had entered and been attracted by the twisted column of the three serpents which is still standing and which bears evidence of his mighty strength, for he shattered with his battle-axe the under jaw of one of the serpents which to the Turkish victors had appeared as the talismans of the captured city.⁹ Here now assembled the Turks, in the eyes of the world a conquered people. The flute-like voices of the muezzins chanted from the nearby minarets as they had in the conqueror's day soon after his coming, and hundreds of low bass voices of members of the ulemas and religious orders took up the "God is Great" hallelujah refrain of the Moslem Turk:

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹ Stanley Lane-Poole, *Turkey*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, London, 1888, p. 130.

"Allah Ekber, Allah Ekber, La Ilaheh Illa Allah, Valla-hu Ekber, Allah Ekber, Ve Lillahil Hamd."

To police the crowd the twentieth century aeroplanes of the Allies buzzed in and out of the historic minarets. The great gathering recalled the years of glory and beauty which looked down from Mohammed the Conqueror, Su-leiman the Magnificent, and other mighty Turkish rulers before whom Europe had trembled as a contrast to the present martyrdom of Smyrna under the Greeks from whom their forefathers wrested Constantinople nearly six centuries before. The slogan of the meeting was: "The peoples are our friends, the governments our enemies," and thousands of voices echoed the concluding sentence, "The sublime emotion which we cherish in our hearts will last till the proclamation of the rights of the peoples."¹⁰

3. The humiliating and unjust Treaty of Sèvres dealing especially with Turkey was the proverbial final straw which roused this people in a movement which resulted in far-reaching changes little foreseen at the time. It was signed on August 10, 1920, by a representative of the Sultan, Vahideddine, who, in the words of a Turkish thinker, "seemed ready to take part with any strong power to turn against his own people. . . . There had been cruel and corrupt sultans in Turkey, there had been imbeciles and drunkards in its history, but never had a son of Osman fallen so low as to manoeuvre for the subjugation of Turkey so that he might live comfortably."

The Treaty of Versailles of June 28, 1919, had abrogated all German rights in the Bagdad Railway and various other economic enterprises. Now the Treaty of Sèvres not only carried still further the liquidation of German interests in the Near East, but "destroyed the Ottoman Em-

¹⁰ Halidé Edib, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-38 for a vivid description of this gathering.

pire and sought to give the Allies a stranglehold upon the economic life of Turkey.”¹¹

For the consumption of the innocent, the provisions of a secret treaty (afterwards made public) of the same date as the treaty, were drawn up “to help Turkey, to develop her resources, and to avoid the international rivalries which have obstructed these objects in the past!” (Cf. Tripartite Agreement of August 10, 1920, between Great Britain, France, and Italy.)

What were some of the principal provisions of the Sèvres agreement? Great Britain and France were to hold mandates in Mesopotamia and in Syria and Cilicia. Great Britain with an eye to the future was confirmed in her oil and navigation concessions in Mesopotamia, while the railway rights of France in Syria were established. Italy was cheated out of the bulk of privileges guaranteed to her under the secret Treaty of London and the St. John de Maurienne Agreement and received only a sphere of influence in southern Anatolia.

Constantinople was put under the jurisdiction of an international commission for control of the Straits of the Bosphorus to the Dardanelles. The Hedjaz was declared to be an independent Arab state. What proved to be an ill-fated Armenian Republic was created.

The portion of Anatolia which remained as the remnant of the Ottoman Empire enjoyed sovereignty in name only, for the capitulations or special concessions to foreigners which the Sultan had terminated soon after the opening of the Great War in 1914 were reestablished and extended. An Inter-Allied Financial Commission was established and given “full supervision over taxation, customs, loans, and currency; exercised final control over the Turkish budget; and had the right to veto any proposed concession.

¹¹ Edward Mead Earle, *Turkey, the Great Powers and the Bagdad Railway*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1924, p. 302.

In control of its domestic affairs the new Turkey was tied hand and foot."¹²

For a further study of the phenomenal changes in the life of a whole people within a single decade it is necessary then for students to ponder these three significant aspects of the Turkish national crisis,—the occupation of Constantinople and the disillusionment with regard to justice; the occupation of Smyrna by the Greeks, the most despised nation of the Allies; and the acceptance by a puppet government of the humiliating and unjust Treaty of Sèvres. The widespread proclamation of Wilson's Fourteen Points even in remote parts of Anatolian Turkey had led to the hope of a peace based on justice. Life was tending to become organized on this hope. The evidences of humiliating injustice meant that the attention of a people was called into active play, and, in spite of the fatigue of a long war, lethargy became impossible. A new mode of behavior must necessarily be devised to meet this new situation. As Thomas points out in defining the concept crisis, it may be simply an incident, a stimulation, a suggestion, but "a crisis may be so serious as to kill the organism or destroy the group or it may result in failure or deterioration."¹³ It is evident that it was crisis in a violent sense which Turkey faced, for, if she had submitted, her national security would have been lost and her recognition in the family of nations would have been insignificant. The violent crisis came and with it the necessary leadership in the vital personality of Mustafa Kemal who has won for Turkey the admiration and the respect of the East as well as that of the Western World at the same time that he has led his country in breaking away from the traditional folkways of centuries.

¹² Edward Mead Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 303. Anyone especially interested in the Treaty of Sèvres would do well to consult this volume.

¹³ William I. Thomas, *Source Book for Social Origins*, p. 18.

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