

7 · Reactionary Despotism or Culmination of the Reforms? The Reign of Sultan Abdülhamit II

By the time the Treaty of Berlin (1878) had been signed, the internal political situation in Istanbul had changed radically. As foreseen in the constitution, elections for an Ottoman parliament had been held in December 1876 and January 1877 and the parliament had been opened officially on 19 March. The provincial and county councils, and not the people, had elected the 130 representatives. Popular interest in the proceedings was almost totally absent and in some places there is evidence that appointments by the governor took the place of elections.¹ Nevertheless, the parliament, or rather the elected second chamber of the parliament, held two sessions during which its members acquitted themselves well. In spite of their inexperience and the lack of representative traditions in the empire, many members genuinely tried to represent the views of their constituencies responsibly. The parliament almost totally failed in its legislative functions, partly because the constitution allowed the sultan and his ministers to govern by decree, but it was an effective forum for criticism of the government's conduct of affairs – so effective and irritating, in fact, that on 14 February 1878 (with the Russian army almost at the gates of Istanbul and public criticism of the government mounting), the sultan prorogued it indefinitely.

This, to all intents and purposes meant the end of the constitutional regime and, from this time on, Sultan Abdülhamit II not only reigned but also ruled as an absolute monarch for 30 years (although the pretence of an imminent return to constitutional rule was kept up until 1880 and the constitution was never officially abolished).² His rule has been the subject of great controversy. Nineteenth-century Europeans came to see him, especially towards the end of his rule, as a blood-thirsty and reactionary tyrant. The bloody repression of the Armenians in the 1890s was instrumental in forming this image. The historians of the Turkish republic, which itself was the legacy of the Young Turks

who forced Abdülhamit from power in 1908–9, likewise see him as a reactionary, who for a generation halted the regeneration of the empire. Modern historians of Turkey since the 1960s have drawn a different picture, emphasizing the way in which his reign marked a continuation, or even the culmination, of the *Tanzimat* and the benefits it brought to the empire and its population.³ Both points of view are correct, yet both only tell half the story.

Elements of continuity

It is true that the administrative centralization, which was the principal theme of the *Tanzimat* reforms, was only brought to fruition in the era of Abdülhamit, aided by a spectacular development of the means of communication in the empire. The most important was the telegraph. The first telegraph lines had been laid down during the Crimean War, connecting Istanbul to the European system. Thereafter, the network spread rapidly and in the era of Abdülhamit it reached every provincial town, thus giving the central government the means effectively to communicate with and exert control over its servants in the provinces for the first time. A well-trained army of telegraph operators came into being.

Railway construction, requiring as it does much greater investment, was far slower to develop, but still the mileage was greatly extended in these years. French and British companies had built the first railways in the Ottoman Empire. They consisted of short stretches connecting the agricultural hinterland with the main ports. The line from İzmit to Haydarpaşa (opposite Istanbul on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus) was opened in 1873, as was the Bursa–Mudanya line. The lines running east from İzmir into the fertile valleys of the Lesser and Greater Menderes were even older, having been started in 1866. In the 1880s and 1890s, these few hundred miles of track were increased to several thousand. The French and British constructed railways inland from the Syrian and Palestinian coasts from 1888 onwards. Macedonia was connected to the capital, as was the interior of Anatolia with the building (by a German company) of the Anatolian railway, which reached Ankara in 1892 and Konya four years later. In 1903 a concession was granted to a German company to extend the line from Konya to the east, to Baghdad and Basra. This was the famous ‘Baghdad railway’, which caused a great deal of tension between the great powers in the years before the First World War. These lines were not simply connections between a productive area and the nearest port; they were powerful instruments for integration and central control (making possible, for instance, the faster movement of troops).

From the late 1870s onwards, steamships began to dominate the long-

distance traffic in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴ Like the railway companies, the steamship companies were almost exclusively foreign owned, except for the lines in and around the capital. In combination with the railway lines connecting the ports to the productive hinterland, the steamships speeded up the integration into the capitalist system of some areas and some sectors of the Ottoman economy. In terms of travelling time and economic activity, such areas were now more closely linked to European ports like Marseilles or Trieste than to places in the interior only a hundred miles away.

These improved technical means made the administration more efficient in collecting taxes, conscripting armies and keeping law and order. In addition, by the 1880s the modern schools had at last begun to turn out sufficient numbers of graduates to staff the bureaucracy at different levels. Both the number of schools and that of students more than doubled between 1867 and 1895, although the ratio of students to the population remained much higher among the Christian communities than among the Muslims. Improved education led to increased literacy, creating a market for the Ottoman press, which expanded rapidly under Abdülhamit in terms of both the number of publications and circulation figures.

Contrasts with the preceding era

The press is the one channel that clearly revealed the Hamidian era as both a continuation of the *Tanzimat* and a break with the past. Newspapers, when compared with the pioneering efforts of the 1860s, were now more professional and reached a much larger public. Between 1876 and 1888, nine to ten new periodicals appeared in Istanbul each year. When strict censorship was introduced in 1888, this number dropped to one a year on average. The censors now prohibited any discussion of political matters, especially anything related to liberalism, nationalism or constitutionalism. Debarred from discussing current affairs in any meaningful way, the newspapers and periodicals filled their pages with encyclopaedic articles about science, geography, history and technology and with literature. In this way, they served to acquaint the Ottoman reading public (still only a fraction of the population) with the outside world. The major newspapers of Istanbul had circulation figures of between 12,000 and 15,000, reaching 30,000 at peak times. In reality, the readership was much greater. This was due to the spread in the 1870s of the phenomenon of the *kiraathane*, a coffee house that stocked all the major periodicals for its clients to peruse while smoking a water pipe or drinking coffee.⁵

The press of the period also shows the fundamental ideological switch of the regime, which represents a clear break with the preceding

era. Not only was the sultan deeply opposed to what he saw as the disruptive forces of liberalism, nationalism and constitutionalism (Ali Pasha and Fuat Pasha in their time had been opposed to these movements too), but also he tried to counter them by emphasizing the traditional and Islamic character of his reign. This trend had already started in the last years of Abdülaziz, but more than any sultan before him, Abdülhamit appealed to Muslim solidarity, using the title and symbols of the caliphate. Not only was his choice informed by a desire to find a counterweight to disruptive ideologies but also it accurately reflected the new situation of the empire, which had become more Asiatic in terms of territory and more Muslim in terms of population as a result of the losses of 1878.⁶

The Islam the sultan supported was that of the more conservative *ulema* and *Sufi* sheikhs with whom he surrounded himself. Islamic modernists do not seem to have enjoyed much support at court. While foreign observers and members of the Christian communities saw it as an atavistic return to fanaticism, the appeal to Islam did strike a chord with Muslims inside and outside the empire who felt threatened by European imperialism and by the privileged position of the Christians. The greatest monument to the Islamist policies of Abdülhamit was the Hijaz railway from Damascus to Medina, built between 1901 and 1908 largely from voluntary contributions in order to serve pilgrims to Mecca.⁷

State ideology was not the only field in which the era of Abdülhamit differed from that of the *Tanzimat*. In the latter era, under weak sultans and strong pashas, the centre of power had been very much at the Porte, with the highest-ranking bureaucrats, but the relationship between the Porte and the palace had never been sufficiently defined and now, with a determined sultan at the top, the centre of power emphatically shifted back to the palace, where it had been under Mahmut II. The palace secretariat, the *Mabeyn* (intermediate office), already enlarged under Abdülaziz in his later years, grew into a formidable bureaucracy. At its summit stood the palace marshal. Until his death in 1897 this was *Gazi* (Hero) Osman Pasha, the defender of Plevna in the 1877 war, an authoritarian and conservative figure who for 20 years was the greatest power behind the throne. Some of the great bureaucrats of Abdülhamit's era, such as *Küçük* (Little) Sait Pasha (grand vizier no less than seven times) and *Kıbrıslı* (Cypriot) Kâmil Pasha, were no less competent than the leaders of the *Tanzimat*, but their subservience to the palace meant that they never gained the same stature.

In a system as autocratic as this, the sultan's personality was of great importance and, through the 1880s and 1890s, this increasingly became a problem. In his younger years Abdülhamit (who was 34 when he

ascended the throne) was frugal, hard working and intelligent. But his background in Ottoman court politics, and especially the events of 1876, which had brought him to the throne, left him feeling insecure and suspicious of his servants. After all, if they could depose Abdülaziz and Murat, why not him? Over the years, this suspicion and his natural desire to remain master in his own house grew into a fear of grotesque proportions. The result was that the sultan came to rely more and more on the internal espionage networks he built up, with people of all ranks being encouraged to report on the activities of others. Tens of thousands of so-called *jurnals* or reports accumulated in the archives of Abdülhamit's *Yıldız* (Star) palace.

With loyalty to his person becoming the sultan's overriding concern, the way was open to large-scale corruption and favouritism, something for which the vastly overstuffed government departments offered ample scope. In every department rational and efficient exercise of its functions was impaired: the navy was not allowed to leave its docks in the Golden Horn for fear it might train its guns on the palace; the army had to conduct its musketry training without bullets. The sultan was well aware of the liberal leanings of many of the graduates from the great military colleges. He therefore tended to rely on – and give preferment to – officers who had risen from the ranks and who had no inkling of modern military science (some of them were illiterate). Within the army, a sharp divide developed between the *mektepli* (from the school) and *alaylı* (from the ranks) officers. Demoralization within the army and the bureaucracy, especially among younger members, gradually became a serious problem. It is in this respect that the Hamidian era was not only a continuation of the *Tanzimat* but also its caricature.

To judge the character and the achievements of the Hamidian era, it is first of all necessary to realize that it was for a long time a period of recovery from a crisis that had come close to putting an end to the Ottoman Empire. The events of 1877–78 were a disaster for the empire. The loss of territory even after the Berlin conference was enormous, including as it did Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Thessalia, parts of Anatolia and Cyprus, all in all about a third of the empire's territory and over 20 per cent of its population.

The disaster was not limited to a military, political or financial one; it was also a tragedy in human terms. Immigration of Muslims into the empire had been a feature of Ottoman life since the late eighteenth century. The Russian Empire had been expanding along the shores of the Black Sea since that time. After the Russian conquest of the Crimea (1771) and again after the Crimean War (1854–56) Muslim Tatars had emigrated from the northern shores of the Black Sea in large numbers. The

total probably was in the region of half a million people. More to the east, the Russians had finally established control over the mountainous Caucasus region by 1864, after a long struggle with *Çerkez* (Circassian) guerrilla bands. Again, many Muslims, sometimes including whole tribes, preferred migrating to the Ottoman lands to living under Christian rulers. Often they were terrorized into fleeing by the advancing Russian army or Georgian and Cossack irregulars. A total of as many as 1.2 million Muslims may have emigrated, or fled, from the Caucasus.⁸

The areas lost to the empire in central Europe up to now had not as a rule had large Muslim populations. In 1877–78, for the first time, areas where a considerable part of the population was Muslim and Turkish came under foreign occupation, a foreign occupation, moreover, that turned a blind eye to, or even assisted in, wholesale killings of Muslim villagers. The result was that about a million people fled. Many returned to their homes after the war, but about 500,000 of them remained refugees (*muhacirs*).⁹ As many as 260,000 were killed or died of disease and starvation. Many of the survivors ended up in Istanbul, but many more were resettled in Anatolia, the Ottoman Balkans, Crete and even Syria, often with great difficulty, contributing to the anti-Christian feeling that became such a force in the late nineteenth century.

The international situation

The basic problems facing the Ottoman government were the same as earlier in the century – a combination of emerging nationalism among the different communities and pressure on the part of the great powers. What made the situation different was that these powers were now locked in an increasingly bitter inter-imperialist struggle, which enabled the Ottomans to play them off against each other more successfully than in the old days of the ‘Concert of Europe’. The Ottoman government had very few other cards to play. One was the threat to arouse Muslim feelings of solidarity around the world, especially in the French, British and Russian empires. Many politicians of the great powers felt that this so-called pan-Islamic policy was a bluff, but they were never quite sure, and the colonial administrators of, for instance, India generally took the threat seriously. In fact, the future showed that the sultan did command a certain loyalty among Muslims outside the empire. The growth of communications had increased contacts within the Islamic world and stimulated feelings of Muslim solidarity. The future also showed that converting these feelings into effective political or even military support was beyond the means of the Ottomans.

Within the international situation the role of the different powers changed. France, the dominant influence in Istanbul in the late 1850s

and 1860s was still recovering from the blow of the lost war with Prussia and, in its search for revenge, also improved its relations with Russia, the arch-enemy of the Ottomans. For Britain, Egypt and Cyprus were now the main cards to play in the Levant, especially after the purchase of the Khedive İsmail's shares in the Suez Canal. Its occupation of Egypt in 1882 seriously strained relations with the Porte (after all Egypt was still nominally part of the Ottoman Empire). Its place in Istanbul was taken to a large extent by the growing influence of Germany, which the Ottomans saw as the least threatening of the European imperialist powers (and the only one not to have colonized Muslim lands). The Germans for their part saw prospects for the creation of a German sphere of economic and military influence in the Ottoman Empire. German military advisers, notably General von der Goltz, trained the Ottoman army and German military doctrines became dominant among the Ottoman military elite. German economic and diplomatic influence also steadily grew. The Germans supported the sultan's pan-Islamic policies. During his well-publicized state visit to the empire in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II declared himself 'the friend of the world's 300 million Muslims'.¹⁰

Intercommunal tensions and conflicts

The international situation thus prevented the great powers from effectively intervening in the communal conflicts of the empire. The two most intractable of these were the Macedonian and the Armenian problems. The area shown on European maps as Macedonia (which coincided with the Ottoman provinces of Salonica, Kosovo and Monastir) had been largely incorporated into the new Bulgaria at San Stefano, but after the Conference of Berlin it had remained in the empire. Emerging nationalism caused more problems in Macedonia than anywhere else because of the composition of its population, which included Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Vlachs and people who regarded themselves as a separate Macedonian nation. All of these were Orthodox Christians, but there were also large Muslim Albanian and Turkish minorities, as well as Jews. These groups' competing nationalist aspirations, and the struggle between Bulgarians and Greeks for control of the Orthodox Church, made the situation in Macedonia unmanageable. Secret committees used terrorism and guerrilla tactics to provoke the intervention of the powers. Most active among these were the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), founded in Salonica in 1893, which wanted autonomy, and the competing External Macedonian Revolutionary Committee (EMRO), founded in Bulgaria in 1895, which wanted annexation by Bulgaria. The powers

tried to intervene in the usual way, proposing reforms and a measure of autonomy under foreign control, but were thwarted by Ottoman procrastination and their own rivalry.

The other great communal problem was that of the Armenians. The Armenians, divided over a large Gregorian and smaller Protestant and Catholic *millets*, constituted a sizeable minority in six of the eastern provinces of Ottoman Anatolia. Most of them were peasants in areas dominated by Turcoman and Kurdish tribes. Over the centuries they had migrated along the major east–west trade routes of Anatolia, so that by the nineteenth century there were also important Armenian settlements in many of the major Anatolian towns and in Istanbul itself. In the towns of Anatolia they were important as craftsmen and traders. The new nationalist ideology began to be felt among the Armenians in the 1870s. An Armenian delegation had demanded reforms in the eastern provinces of Anatolia at the Conference of Berlin but only Russia had offered it lukewarm support.

Then, in 1887 Armenian students in Geneva formed a radical nationalist organization called *Henchak* (the Bell), which was followed by a more moderate and larger social-democrat organization called *Dashnakzoutiun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), founded in Tiflis in 1890. These committees aimed at Armenian independence (something the majority of the Armenian community, especially the wealthier members, did not yet contemplate) and they aimed at attracting worldwide attention through terrorist attacks.

The government reacted by enrolling Kurdish tribes in new irregular regiments modelled on the Russian Cossack troops, the so-called *Hamidiye* units. In autumn 1894 a series of incidents led to a large-scale slaughter of Armenians by *Hamidiye* troops in the district of Sasun. A storm of indignation swept over Europe, but tentative negotiations between the great powers about how to force the Ottoman government to introduce reforms in the east failed because of inter-power rivalry. In 1895 and 1896 there were again widespread massacres in the east and now also in Istanbul, where an Armenian group occupied the headquarters of the Ottoman Bank and threatened to blow it up. Again, the powers did nothing effective. After 1896, the Ottoman government gradually re-established control and the fighting died down.

While Ottoman prestige in Europe was at its lowest due to the Armenian situation, Ottoman self-confidence was suddenly raised in the spring of 1897, when the empire declared war on Greece (which had been openly supporting a new Cretan rebellion) and defeated it within weeks. The Ottomans were prevented from keeping their conquests by the European powers but Greece had to pay a large indemnity

and cease supporting the rebellion. None of the problems with the nationalities (Macedonia, Armenia, Crete) had been solved, but after 1896 the acute political crises seemed to be defused somewhat and the Hamidian regime enjoyed relative stability for another decade.

Finance and economics

As problematic as the political situation Abdülhamit inherited was the financial situation. The state had defaulted on its debt in 1875 and the war against Russia had brought with it enormous expenses, so the empire was essentially bankrupt and its credit and credibility in the European financial markets, which were anyway much more tight-fisted in the current depression, were completely gone. Negotiations about the debt crisis started as soon as peace was restored in 1878 and a solution was worked out gradually over the next few years.

As had earlier been the case in Tunisia and in Egypt, the solution was found in the creation, under the *Muharram* (a month in the Muslim calendar) decree of 1881, of a Public Debt Administration (the *Caisse de la Dette Publique Ottomane*), which was governed by a board on which sat representatives of the holders of Ottoman government bonds in Europe. At the same time, half of the outstanding debt of the empire was rescinded. The PDA built up a modern bureaucracy, which would eventually have more than 5000 employees, through which it directly managed a number of revenue sources, such as the tribute of some provinces, the salt and tobacco monopolies and taxes on things as diverse as silk, spirits and fisheries. After deduction of costs, these revenues were used for the servicing of the public debt. The PDA was much more efficient as a tax collector than the government and it controlled roughly one-third of regular state income. The direct intervention of European capital in the Ottoman economy through the PDA and the slowly growing efficiency of the Ottoman government's administration counteracted to a certain extent the strong position the Greek and Armenian intermediaries had built up in the economy during the *Tanzimat* era.

For a long time Abdülhamit's government borrowed very little abroad and paid off more of its old debt than it raised in new loans. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did the pace of new borrowing accelerate. The growth of international trade, too, was slow in the first 20 years of the sultan's reign, which coincided with the 'Great Depression' in Europe. From 1896 onwards, the growth of trade resumed, in line with the recovery in the industrial economies of Europe, albeit at a slower rate than had been the case in 1830–75.¹¹

The years 1888–96 saw the first wave of direct investment by foreign

companies in the empire, most of it (two-thirds) in railways. This boom was partly motivated by profit seeking (especially since the Ottoman government was persuaded to give a kilometric guarantee payment that eliminated all real risk for the builders), but also to a large extent by the inter-imperialist rivalry and the desire to create spheres of influence around the new railways. After 1896, foreign investment contracted sharply. It picked up again at a much slower pace after 1905.

Britain remained the major trading partner of the Ottoman Empire, as it had been since the start of the century, taking about a quarter of all Ottoman exports (mainly agricultural produce) and delivering between 30 and 40 per cent of its imports. In investment, however, the British firms, which were much less strongly supported by their government than their continental counterparts, lost out to France and, especially, Germany. Britain's share of total investment fell from over 50 per cent to under 20 per cent during this period, while German investment increased sharply from around 1 per cent to over 25 per cent. It was France, however, that became the major investor, increasing its share from approximately 30 to 50 per cent.¹²

The traditional handicraft industry of the empire had been and continued to be severely affected by cheap industrial imports, especially in the coastal regions. At the same time, some industrial sectors restructured themselves and survived and some entirely new ones sprang up. By and large, these new industries (such as the silk factories built in Bursa by Armenian entrepreneurs, the carpet-making industry in Uşak, breweries and tile manufacturers in Salonica) were based on extremely cheap non-guild labour, often women and children, working in small establishments.¹³ Over 90 per cent of the industrial establishments with more than ten workers were owned by non-Muslims.

The growth of the new industries and the direct involvement of modern European companies created tensions in Ottoman society. The Ottoman authorities had traditionally protected the urban guilds. Now the authorities were often caught between the imperatives of rational practices, as the foreign companies understood them, and the traditional demands of the hard-pressed guilds.

The Young Turk movement

As we have seen, relations between the government and the Christian communities, especially the Armenians, grew more and more strained as the years wore on, but the sultan was not unpopular with the large majority of the empire's Muslim population. Nor was there any reason he should be because, while it would be an exaggeration to say that the peasants of the empire were well off, at least they were largely spared

the major disasters of war, famine and epidemics. Bubonic plague had ceased to be a major problem by the middle of the century and typhoid and cholera receded after 1880. As a result, during Abdülhamit's reign, the population of the empire increased from about 20 million in the late 1870s to more than 27 million by the end of the century (excluding areas like Egypt and Cyprus) – an increase of 37 per cent. In Anatolia the population grew even faster, by almost 50 per cent.¹⁴

Abdülhamit's major weakness was his failure to instil loyalty in the new generations of bureaucrats and officers, the Ottoman intelligentsia, which his own expanded educational institutions were producing. While it could be argued that his government succeeded remarkably well in keeping the remains of the empire intact, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire of his contemporary Francis Joseph II, it completely failed to provide inspiration and a sense of direction to its own servants.

The new generations being trained in schools like the *Mülkiye* and *Harbiye* (War Academy) continued to be attracted by the liberal and constitutional ideas, as well as the Ottoman patriotism, of the Young Ottomans, whose books they read and discussed clandestinely.

Directly after the suspension of parliament, there had been two armed attempts to remove Abdülhamit and replace him with Murat V, who was rumoured to have recovered completely. Former Young Ottoman Ali Suavi led one of the attempts, and Masonic friends of the former sultan another. Both failed. The next ten years saw no organized action of any significance, but in the schools low-level agitation continued despite tight government control. The first organized opposition group seems to have been established in the Military Medical College in 1889, when four students founded the *İttihad-i Osmani Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Unity Society), which aimed to reinstate the constitution and parliament. Interestingly, the four included an Albanian, a Kurd and a Circassian. Over the next few years this society slowly grew. Some of its members were arrested by the sultan's police and some managed to escape arrest by fleeing abroad, mostly to Paris, but also to Cairo and Athens. In Paris they found a small circle of Ottoman constitutionalist *émigrés*, who attacked the sultan in pamphlets and periodicals. The leading figure in this circle was Ahmet Rıza, son of a member of the Ottoman parliament and a former director of education in Bursa. The plotters in Istanbul approached Ahmet Rıza who agreed to accept the leadership of the organization in Europe in 1895. Rıza, who was a positivist, tried to have the society renamed the 'Society for Order and Progress' (the positivist motto), but this was rejected by the Istanbul group. Instead, the society was now renamed *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Society, or Committee of Union and Progress, CUP). The

'union' in its name of course referred to the unity of the (ethnic) elements, the old ideal of the Young Ottomans. Under Ahmet Rıza's leadership the Paris branch now published the newspaper *Meşveret* (Consultation), in both Ottoman and French, from 1895 onwards. In France the group called itself *Jeunes Turcs* (Young Turks), much as the Young Ottomans had done thirty years earlier.¹⁵

During the years of the Armenian crisis (1894–96) when Abdülhamit's government became ever more unpopular and isolated internationally, CUP membership suddenly increased rapidly. The Istanbul branch of the Committee tried to organize a coup d'état in September 1896, but the plans were betrayed on the eve of its execution and the conspirators arrested. Most of them were sent into internal exile.¹⁶

The constitutional movement within the empire had received a serious setback and for the next ten years the centre of gravity of the opposition moved to the groups in Europe. From time to time Young Turks who had managed to flee from their places of exile joined them. Their arrival usually meant a new impetus for the movement. It also meant rivalry, because not all the Young Turks were prepared to follow Ahmet Rıza's lead, mainly because as a convinced positivist he went much further in his rejection of religion than most Young Turks were prepared to go. They were all of them influenced by European currents such as scientism, materialism and social Darwinism, but not positivists in the strict sense of belonging to the 'Church of Humanity'. Personality also played a part: Ahmet Rıza seems to have been an uncompromising and difficult man.

The first major challenge to Rıza's leadership was the arrival in Paris in 1896 of *Mizancı* Murat Bey, a former teacher at the *Mülkiye* who had become famous as editor of the liberal paper *Mizan* (Balance), first in Istanbul and then, in 1895, in Cairo. Although a liberal, Murat attached much greater importance to the caliphate and to the Islamic character of the empire than did Rıza. In this he was more in tune with the majority of the movement, which elected him president of the CUP in Ahmet Rıza's place after his arrival in Paris. Early in 1897, Murat and a group of followers moved the headquarters of the CUP to Geneva.

Six months later, however, Sultan Abdülhamit made use of his increased prestige (with the worst of the Armenian troubles over and the war against Greece of that year won) to deal with the internal and external opposition. In the capital, all known Young Turks were rounded up and after a mock trial sent into internal exile in Tripolitania, while at the same time agents of the sultan managed to persuade *Mizancı* Murat and a number of other prominent Young Turks to return to 'help him in his reforms'. Even though the CUP tried to portray this

agreement as a truce, the credibility of many of the Young Turk leaders was destroyed when they accepted sinecures in Abdülhamit's government or diplomatic service. Their attitude vindicated Ahmet Rıza, who was now once again the undisputed leader of the movement in exile. But the movement had been dealt a serious blow, and the years 1897–99 were its nadir.

In December 1899 the movement received new impetus with the arrival in Paris of a rich Ottoman prince, Mahmut Celâlettin Pasha (a half-brother of the sultan), who had fled to France with his two sons, Sabahattin and Lutfullah. Until his death three years later, the pasha's role among the Young Turks was similar to that played by Mustafa Fazıl Pasha a generation earlier among the Young Ottomans. At the same time his elder son, Sabahattin, posed the most serious threat yet to Ahmet Rıza's authority. Sabahattin was unusual among the Young Turks in that he saw the engine for change and progress, not in the state, but in the individual, believing in minimal government and the power of free enterprise to regenerate the empire, while Ahmet Rıza was becoming more and more of an Ottoman nationalist. Between them they split the movement and this split became manifest at the first 'Congress of Ottoman Liberals', organized in Paris in 1902.

When using this term 'liberal' we should be well aware of its meaning in this context. Even though the Young Turks fought for the restoration of parliament and were against the autocratic sultan, they were not democrats. Their allies and examples in France without exception were representatives of the political right, mostly conservative nationalist liberals, who were traumatized by the twin blows of the defeat by Germany and the insurrection of the Paris commune (both in 1870–71). The French thinker who exerted the greatest influence on the Unionists was Gustave LeBon, whose works on mass psychology were inspired by a deep distrust of popular movements.¹⁷ Prens Sabahattin's circle was even further to the right, consisting of reactionary Catholic aristocrats who strove to emulate the British aristocracy in its role in empire building. It is significant that none of the Young Turks felt attracted to socialism of any kind, even though they must have witnessed the growth of the socialist movement in France.

At the 1902 congress all nationalities of the empire were represented. The majority, including the Armenian organizations and Sabahattin's group, declared that both violence and foreign intervention in the empire were permissible as means to remove Abdülhamit. Ahmet Rıza rejected both, fearing for the empire's independence. After the congress, the split was formalized when the prince founded first the 'Society of Ottoman Liberals' and then in 1906 the *Teşebbüs-ü Şahsi ve*

Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti (Society for Private Initiative and Decentralization). In line with the decisions of the congress, Sabahattin's faction attempted to organize a military coup d'état with the help of the Ottoman garrison in Tripolitania, but this remained stillborn.

For the more nationalist and centralist wing of the movement led by Ahmet Rıza, 1905 and 1906 were crucial years. Both Ottoman nationalism and constitutionalism received a boost from the outcome of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904/5 and its aftermath, the first Russian revolution. In the war, an Asiatic state had for the first time defeated one of the great imperial powers of Europe. Japan now became a role model for many Young Turks. Furthermore, in the following unrest in Russia, the tsar had been forced to grant Russia a legislative assembly and a measure of constitutionalism. Shortly after, in 1906, even backward Persia underwent a constitutional revolution. These events inspired the Ottoman opposition movement. At the same time, one of the prominent Unionists in Istanbul (and private physician to Prince Yusuf İzzettin, the second in line to the throne) was arrested and banished to Erzincan, from where he fled to Paris. Once in Paris, Dr Bahaettin Şakir was appalled by the lack of effectiveness he saw in Ahmet Rıza's organization and he set about reorganizing it almost from scratch. Ahmet Rıza had always been more of a theoretician than a practical politician, but Bahaettin Şakir, together with another leading figure from Ahmet Rıza's wing of the Young Turk movement, Dr Nazım, for the first time gave the CUP a sound organizational basis, with branches in many parts of the empire and adjacent countries and an effective secretariat and communications. The change was symbolized by a new name: the Committee of Union and Progress was now renamed Committee of Progress and Union (*Terakki ve İttihat Cemiyeti*).¹⁸

In 1907 a new attempt was made to unite the whole opposition movement at a second congress in Paris. This time the initiative came from the Armenian groups, and even the reorganized CUP now agreed to the use of violent means. The reason for this change of attitude lay in developments within the empire. There, small local groups, both at the great colleges in the capital and in provincial centres, had survived the crackdown of 1896, but contact between them had been lost. New groups were founded constantly, but none of them managed to establish a nationwide network until the founding in September 1906 of the *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Freedom Society) in Salonica. The founders were young bureaucrats and officers, of whom some had been connected to the CUP before 1896. The driving force behind the Committee was Mehmet Talât, a postal official from Edirne, who had

been banished from there in 1896 because of his involvement in the old CUP and who had now become chief telegraph clerk at Salonica post office. Thanks to his organizational genius, the Ottoman Freedom Society spread rapidly in Macedonia. The crucial development was the involvement of officers from the Third (Macedonian) and Second (Edirne) armies, in which Major Enver of the staff of the Third Army played a leading role. In 1907, the Salonica group established contact with the *émigrés* in Paris and, finding the ideas of Ahmet Rıza much more to their liking than those of Prens Sabahattin, decided to demand a merger of their own group with his. After protracted negotiations this came about in October 1907. Eventually, the new organization reverted to the traditional name *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*.

Within the empire, and especially within the army, the years 1906 to 1908 seem to have witnessed increasing discontent, due to rising prices (inflation having picked up speed in the first years of the century) and to the fact that payment of salaries was even more in arrears than normal. Signs of discontent in the shape of strikes and small-scale rebellions, which have been documented for many different parts of the empire, set the stage, but the Macedonian problem was the direct cause of the revolution of July 1908.

In June that year, the Russian tsar and King Edward VII of Britain met at Reval in the Baltic. Britain and Russia had gradually been drawing closer out of a common fear of Germany, and on this occasion statesmen from both countries tried to settle some of the remaining problems between them. One of the results was a proposal for the settlement of the Macedonian problem, based on foreign control that would leave the sultan with only formal suzerainty. When news of the Reval meeting reached Salonica (accompanied by rumours that Britain and Russia had agreed to partition the Ottoman Empire), the CUP decided to act. The timing of its actions was probably also influenced by the discovery that government agents were on the verge of uncovering parts of the organization.

In a coordinated campaign, officers who were members of the Committee (among them Enver) took to the hills with their troops and demanded the restoration of the constitution. The sultan tried to quell the revolt by sending first trusted officers and then Anatolian troops to Macedonia, but some of the officers were murdered and the troops, influenced by CUP agitators aboard their ships, refused to fight the insurgents. The sultan then gave in and on the night of 23 July 1908 announced that the constitution would henceforth be applied in full and parliament reconvened after an interval of 30 years.