

3. A Jewish, Socialist and Ottoman Organization: the Workers' Federation of Salonica

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Being a Jew was not too bad. The Ottoman Empire of the early 1900s, with a long practice of cohabitation between ethnic and religious groups behind it, accepted Judaism well enough. But to be a Jew as well as an Ottoman, while laying claim to socialism, was something else. In the early 20th century, the Jews of the Ottoman Empire did not often venture on the public stage to proclaim their opinions. They considered their place was at home, in their shops, in the surgery, in the office. Not many abandoned this neutrality to express social or political ideas. Unlike other Ottoman communities, Jews did not challenge the established order, probably because they knew that they were too 'vulnerable', too 'minoritarian'.

Given these circumstances, the Workers' Federation of Salonica (WFS) certainly represents a very remarkable phenomenon. Most of its militants were Jews. One of their favourite themes was the need to defend the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, but at the same time they constantly fought the 'bourgeois' power of the Young Turks in the name of their socialist principles. Was the WFS simply a small group uniting a few eccentrics? It seems not: most surprisingly, shortly after its foundation, it could claim several thousands of supporters. This, at a time when most other socialist formations of the empire had but a handful of sympathizers, makes one wonder.

The background

To understand how the Federation could emerge and develop, it is necessary to observe in the first place the environment in which it was rooted.

At the time of the Young Turk revolution, Thessaloniki, with a population of about 150,000 persons, was one of the most important

cities of the Ottoman Empire. It was the junction of a network of railways linking it not only to Istanbul but, through Serbian and Bosnian railways, to the main European lines. The port, the last development of which dated from 1902, was responsible for nearly a seventh of the foreign trade of the Ottoman Empire. It exported cereals, mining products, tobacco, cotton, opium, hides and silkworm cocoons, while imports consisted of manufactured goods, textiles, colonial products and certain agricultural items.¹

This important commercial activity stimulated in Thessaloniki and its suburbs a number of industries to replace the ruined crafts. According to Risal, there existed at the beginning of the 20th century, in this city, two spinning mills, one model mill, one brick factory, two breweries, about ten soap factories, silkworm-breeding establishments, carpet and shoe-making factories and, especially, important plants for the processing of tobacco.² These industries supported nearly 20,000 workers who, together with some 5000 transport employees, formed a substantial proletariat, the essential characteristic of which was its ethnic heterogeneity. Side by side with Jews who represented nearly half the population, there were among this proletariat large numbers of Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks, Serbs and Albanians, and also of Dönmes (Jews converted to Islam), who are rather difficult to identify. It was this multiplicity that would be stressed by the militants who in 1909 established themselves under the distinctive sign of federalism.

According to the socialist press, this great mass of workers was cruelly exploited. In Thessaloniki, as well as in other industrial centres of the empire, the working day consisted of 14-16 hours, whereas wages and salaries were maintained at a few piastres, the purchasing power of which was constantly falling within the inflationist context of the early 1900s. Consequently, from the very beginning of the century, social unrest was clearly perceptible. Thessaloniki's workers, far from being a passive mass, presented an exemplary pugnacity. The groups they formed took on the characteristics of trade unions, very different from the mutual help associations organized on the initiative of employers. Sporadic strikes flared up: in 1904, for example, there was a strike of textile workers and in 1906 a strike of ceramics workers of the Allatini factory.³ During these strikes, we note the development of political consciousness which would soon serve the purpose of the Federation.

This awakening of consciousness was probably rooted partly in the impressive educational infrastructure which the various Thessaloniki communities had gradually put in place. The Jews maintained about 50

schools in which some 9000 pupils received their basic education. In particular, they had at their disposal the seven establishments of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which offered valuable education in French. The Muslim community possessed 32 primary schools and several establishments of secondary education. Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Romanians also have their own institutions. Furthermore, the French secular mission has founded in 1905 a French lycée, a secondary school for young girls and a commercial school. We also find several German schools, the first of which had been created in 1887 and lived off subsidies of the Company of Eastern Railways. In 1907 the city would even be endowed with a law school and proposals for a project of a medical faculty would be discussed.⁴

The Macedonian metropolis, rich in schools, could also be proud of its press. Since 1895 it possessed permanently two or three newspapers in French, five or six in Judeo-Spanish, three or four in Greek, three or four in Turkish, at least two in Bulgarian and one in Romanian. At the time of the Young Turk revolution, the *Asir* (Century) was probably the most widely read of Turkish provincial newspapers in the empire.

There were also, besides theatres and cinemas, a quantity of meeting places-clubs, several Masonic lodges,⁵ about ten large bar-restaurants etc. Here, from the beginning of the century onwards, meetings and conferences proliferated. According to Risal, a real 'epidemic' struck the city, signalling great upheavals and reaching its zenith immediately after the revolutionary events of July 1908.⁶

Naturally, the national revendications of the various communities that were struggling with each other for Macedonia took pride of place in these debates. Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and militants of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) did not stop agitating in the city, introducing into it a climate of insecurity that was noted by all observers.

Thessaloniki, the crossroad of nationalist fervours, was nevertheless mainly a Jewish city. The 60,000 Sephardic Jews and some 20,000 Dönmes that made up the Jewish population made their mark not only on the economic life of the city but also on its cultural, social and political aspects. The Israelite community dominated the commercial sector and most of the industries. Jews also constituted an important portion of the proletariat, notably in factories processing tobacco, in transport, in small industry (carpentry, textiles, tailoring etc.) and among typographers. Judeo-Spanish was the language most often spoken and the literature and press in this language were quite important. The

community owned numerous schools, 30 synagogues, a large hospital, a health centre, a mental hospital and an orphanage. In the affairs of the municipality, Jews (and particularly Dönmes) were invested with real power. But their influence was especially felt through the Masonic-lodges and clubs. In this manner they enjoyed an invisible and diffuse authority that enabled them to occupy a preponderant place in the city.

Faced with the growing troubles in Macedonia, this community remained faithful to the status quo in the Balkans. In case of a Greek advance towards Thessaloniki, the Jewish community had no intention of giving up the Macedonian hinterland upon which its commerce and its industries depended. Neither was it the intention of the Jews to be cut off from the important commercial axis of the Near East, as would be the case in the event of the constitution of a greater Bulgaria. What they wanted was the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire with the integrity of its frontiers.

Besides these economic considerations, there was also the factor of 'security'. On the whole, the Jews of Thessaloniki were satisfied with the relative peace they enjoyed under the Ottoman 'yoke'; they were afraid of various difficulties, even of pogroms that might occur, should there be a change of master. Under the circumstances, they remained absolutely impervious to the arguments of various national movements. They even distrusted Zionism. In spite of active propaganda, this movement had as a result only a few hundred departures to Palestine between 1905 and 1912. On the contrary, the Sephardic Jews turned in large part to Ottomanism, subscribing to the idea of immutability of boundaries and the promise that ethnic and religious minorities would enjoy the same civic rights as Muslims.⁷

This unconditional attachment to the empire would be expressed after the Young Turk revolution by a massive adherence of Thessaloniki's Jewish element to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Under the circumstances prevailing at the time, the committee appeared to be the only political force able to introduce order in Ottoman affairs. Faced with the intervention of Western states and with the danger of a break-down of the Balkan equilibrium, the Jews' only option was to rally massively to the CUP in an attempt to defend their own habitat.

An appreciation of this loyalist attitude of Thessaloniki's Jewish community is fundamental to any understanding of the political options of the WFS. Naturally, we cannot reduce the Federation to its Jewish component only. It was a socialist organization addressing the

Thessaloniki proletariat as a whole – Not Jews alone, but also the Greeks, Bulgarians and Turks who were present in great numbers among the city's workers. Some of its main leaders – Angel Tomov and Dimitar Vlahov for instance – were not Jews. But it was Jewish in majority and obviously had to reflect the fears and aspirations of its base. It could not ignore the dangers that threatened Macedonia. It could not avoid fearing the collapse of the Balkan edifice. Under the then prevailing circumstances, when most of Thessaloniki's Jews adopted the Ottoman doctrine, the Federation was also Ottomanist. But this doctrine was viewed in the socialist light and the Federation would seek its support only the better to reinforce the struggle for unification of the proletarian forces of the empire.

The Ottomanist convictions of the Federation would result essentially in the founding of a Thessaloniki-based organization according to the federalist formula. This option took into consideration the partition of the Thessaloniki proletariat into numerous national groups, between which subsisted important ethnic, cultural and religious barriers. The promoters of the Federation being realists, they would not endeavour to abolish these divisions, but would opt instead for an organization in which all the nationalities might join.⁸

The Sources

In many ways, the WFS was a unique organization. It was unique in its almost exclusively Jewish recruitment in a context in which Jews were generally noted for their reluctance to intervene in political matters. It was also singular by its doctrinal orientation, favouring the established power at a time when socialists of all countries were more or less at war with the establishment. Another singularity which should be stressed is the abundance and quality of the material at the disposal of researchers who endeavour to recount its history.

The WFS created in May-June 1909 by a group of militant Sephardic Jews (Abraham Benaroya, A.J. Arditti, David Recanati, Joseph Hazan) together with a certain number of Bulgarians and Macedonians (Angel Tomov and Dimitar Vlahov in particular) demanded in June 1909 its affiliation to the Socialist International.⁹ It was to constitute, with the Bulgarian socialist group of Thessaloniki, the Workers' Party of Turkey, the Ottoman section of the International. The request was examined at a meeting of the Bureau of the Socialist International (ISB) on 7 November,¹⁰ during which meeting Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the ISB, reminded the meeting of the fact that the International in 1907

had admitted the 'subsection of Turkish Armenia'. It had been decided that an 'Ottoman section' would be affiliated only if it comprised all the nationalities living in Turkey. As proposed by Vaillant, it was resolved that the WFS would be admitted not as the 'Ottoman section', but as a 'subsection of workers of Salonica', to be represented with one vote on the ISB.¹¹

Subsequent to this affiliation, an intensive correspondence developed between the WFS and the secretariat of the ISB of which we have presently at our disposal about a 100 letters dating from 1909 to 1914. These letters were discovered by Georges Haupt in the archives of the ISB and they allow us to follow the activity of the Federation practically from day to day. They also give us precious indications as to how the Thessaloniki socialists succeeded to conquer the obstacles put in their path by the Young Turk government.

Most of the letters addressed by the Federation to Huysmans were signed either by Joseph Hazan or by Saul Nahum. Hazan was one of the secretaries of the Federation and directed the organization from 1911, when Benaroya, its secretary-general, had been exiled to Serbia by the Ottoman government.¹² Nahum was the representative of the Federation at the ISB. An active militant of the International, he endeavoured to contact Huysmans and certain leading French socialists and to keep them informed of the political situation in the empire. Among other WFS authors we find the names of Benaroya, Abraham Hasson and David Recanati. The last named, one of the founders of the Federation, published articles in the Judeo-Spanish press of Thessaloniki under the pseudonym 'Rod'. As to Hasson, he had transferred from the Narrow trend of the BWSDP. Profoundly influenced by the theories of Plekhanov, he seems to represent one of the most radical elements of the Federation.¹³

Most of the ISB's letters were signed by Camille Huysmans, but unfortunately we have found only ten of them. Some are most interesting, for they give precise information on various actions undertaken or promoted by the International in order to oppose the destruction of Ottoman socialism by the Young Turks. A detailed analysis of the registers in which Huysmans summarized the letters sent to his correspondents might show up a number of supplementary texts.

Correspondence between the Federation and the ISB is certainly a source of utmost importance as regards the internal history of the Thessaloniki organization. But it has grave deficiencies. In particular, it gives practically no information on workers' lives in the region, and it is

silent on the subject of 'theoretical' options of the Federation. Luckily, we can complete what is missing with the aid of another fundamental source: periodicals published by Thessaloniki socialists during the years 1909-14.

We have not found all the periodicals of the time. Thus, for instance, Dimitar Vlahov quotes in his memoirs a number of organs:¹⁴ the *Socialističeska federacia* which appeared in early summer 1909, the *Mücadele*, (Struggle) published in Turkish on the occasion of the 1912 elections and the *Rabotničeska solidarnost*, in Bulgarian, which we have had no possibility to examine. On the other hand, we have found other publications of the Federation¹⁵ which suffice to give us some information as to the preoccupations and theoretical options of Thessaloniki socialist militants.

The first organ of the Federation at our disposal pertains to the period 15 August–16 October 1909. This was a weekly 'Workers' Newspaper' published in four languages: the *Amele gazetesi* in Turkish, the *Ephimeris tou ergatou* in Greek, the *Rabotničeski vestnik* in Bulgarian and the *Jornal do laborador* in Judeo-Spanish.

Each of these editions had its own peculiarities, with considerable textual differences between different editions. Publications in Greek and in Turkish were much shorter than those in Bulgarian and in Judeo-Spanish. The *Rabotničeski vestnik* was the most profuse and the most 'theoretical' of the four weeklies. Because of a lack of readers, the *Amele gazetesi* and the *Ephimeris tou ergatou* stopped after four issues. Only the *Jornal do laborador* and the *Rabotničeski vestnik* succeeded in holding out until the ninth number, of 16 October 1909. According to correspondence of the Federation and Huysmans, publication of these two organs was stopped for financial reasons.¹⁶ There is reason to believe, however, that other factors also played a part. As a matter of fact, it is to be noted that the suspension of the weekly coincided with an important crisis within the Federation that resulted in the departure of most of the Bulgarian militants.¹⁷

It would appear that this weekly was replaced by another – the *Solidaridad obradera* – only at the beginning of 1911. Possibly this new publication was accompanied, at least for some time, by an edition in Bulgarian.¹⁸ The first number of the *Solidaridad obradera* bears the date 17 February 1911; the last one, 16 February 1912. At that time, in the course of the election campaign, the *Solidaridad obradera* was probably replaced by another organ in Turkish: the *Mücadele*, which unfortunately we have not been able to trace.¹⁹

After Thessaloniki had been incorporated into Greece, the Federation launched a new paper, the *Avanti*, which appeared until mid-1914, according to the data at our disposal. The publication of this organ under very difficult circumstances proves the spirit of perseverance that animated the militants of the Federation during the years 1909-14.

A brief analysis of the contents of WFS periodicals shows above all the pride of place given to workers' information: strikes, congresses, news emanating from trade unions etc. In spite of their tame appearance, these items represent a real education in workers' struggle. By means of a number of concrete examples, the Thessaloniki workers were constantly incited to form organizations and to train themselves in class solidarity.

Side by side with those articles pertaining to local workers' lives, we also find in the *Rabotničeski vestnik*, as well as in the *Solidaridad obradera*, editorials devoted to important contemporary problems. There is no doubt that the objective of these editorials was to educate the political conscience of the Federation audience. As far as we know, the organs of the WFS were the only periodicals published in the Ottoman Empire to examine the circumstances of the time from a socialist perspective without the slightest restraint.

Some of the items published in the newspapers of the Federation had a clearly 'theoretical' aspect. In particular, Angel Tomov and Abraham Benaroya did not hesitate to take up in their articles – especially at the time of the *Rabotničeski vestnik* – the major problems of Balkan socialism. The national problem was at the very centre of their concern. How to prevent the exploitation of proletarian masses by the bourgeoisie acting in the name of the 'national banner'? How to overcome the ethnic and religious divisions that obstructed the class conscience of workers? For Thessaloniki, placed as it was at the very eye of the Balkan storm, this was a question of primary importance. Like many other socialist leaders of the time, Benaroya and Tomov were certain that socialism would conquer national antagonisms. They were convinced that they had at their disposal an irresistible weapon: the federative principle. It was by means of a federation of trade unions and political organizations that they intended to put an end to the dissensions between the various national groups that together constituted the Ottoman proletariat.

Besides the socialist press of Thessaloniki, we must also quote among important sources of the Federation's history the main socialist organs of Europe. Even a superficial look at newspapers such as the *Humanité* (Paris), *Le peuple* (Brussels) and the *Vorwärts* (Berlin) is

enough to show that they were, on the whole, and thanks to the carefully chosen informants, acquainted well enough with events in the Ottoman Empire. We know, for instance, that the *Humanité* for a large part of its data was indebted to Armenian socialist militants. Among the great providers of 'bulletins' concerning Turkey and the Balkans we must also mention Saul Nahum, the WFS representative in Paris, and Dr Refik Nevzad, animator of the Paris section of the Ottoman Socialist Party (OSP).

One of the numerous periodical organs of socialist movement that deserves special attention is the *Bulletin périodique du BSI* Edited from 1909 by the executive committee of the International, in Brussels, it consists mainly of a collection of documents (accounts of conferences, resolutions, circulars etc.) reflecting the evolution of the socialist movement in various countries represented within the International. Documents pertaining to the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans are especially numerous in the collection. This is not surprising: at the time, the 'Eastern question' constituted one of the great pivots of international political life.

Finally, we must mention among the main sources, the memoirs of the two principal protagonists of Thessaloniki socialism: Abraham Benaroya and Dimitar Vlahov.

The memoirs of Benaroya, published in Greek in 1975,²⁰ relate the history of the Federation from its origin to the time when it became one of the components of the Greek Communist Party. In spite of some inaccuracies, this account by the founder of the Federation tallies well enough with information gathered elsewhere, thanks to documents found in the ISB archives.

On certain points, however, Benaroya's account provides new elements. In particular, we must underline the interest of the pages he devotes to issues that, from 1909 on, brought the socialists of Thessaloniki into conflict with the CUP and other 'bourgeois' groups of the city, in particular with the 'Club des Intimes'. Benaroya analyses with great lucidity the means made use of by the 'bosses' in order to gain control over the newly founded workers' organizations and describes with precision the various stages of the socialist action. His narrative also allows us to visualize with a certain precision the relations between the Federation and other socialist organizations of the empire, in particular the Istanbul Group of Social Studies.

These memoirs possess a quality which is rather rare in this kind of work: objectivity. This quality displays itself in particular in pages

devoted to differences of opinion between the Federation and the BWSDP. With the passing of time, the leader of the Federation seems to acknowledge that the 'Narrow' Bulgarians were not totally mistaken and that their positions conformed to Marxist teaching.

The memoirs of Dimitar Vlahov, which appeared in Skopje in 1970,²¹ cover the history of Balkan socialism since the end of the 19th century but stress in particular the events which followed the Young Turk revolution.

In 1908, Vlahov (1874-1954) was 34 years old. Of Macedonian origin, he had agitated until then within the IMRO. After the Young Turk revolution, he gradually withdrew from this organization and became one of the founders of the National Federative Party which had originated in the left wing of the IMRO. When this party was dissolved by the Union and Progress government, he joined the Federation with some of his comrades. In 1908 he was elected deputy of Thessaloniki on the list of the CUP. He remained a member of the Istanbul Parliament until January 1912. There he gave important political speeches and presented numerous bills. Throughout this period he acted as an intermediary between the Federation and the Unionists. It was only from 1912 onwards that he openly adopted a position hostile to the CUP

His memoirs inform us in particular about the creation, in 1909, of the National Federative Party in Thessaloniki. They also give information about the social and political ideas promoted by socialists immediately after the Young Turk revolution. In particular they contain a long account of the Ottoman elections of 1912, which were marked by acts of violence that have left a rather bad memory in Turkish political history.

In this short survey of sources we have mentioned only the material that seems essential, but of course research workers also have other texts at their disposal: reports of French consuls stationed in Thessaloniki and preserved in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris or in Nantes, consular reports in the Foreign Office (London) and in the Haus-Hof und Staatsarchiv (Vienna), the regional press, accounts in various periodicals etc. A large part of this material was gathered together and published in 1989 by the Centre of Marxist Research of Thessaloniki.²²

Thus, it can be seen that, all in all, the available documentation is extensive. Thanks to this material the history of the WFS can be studied in detail. We shall see, however, that there remain quite a few dark patches. In spite of the many works that have already been devoted to

the organization of Abraham Benaroya, the exhaustive monograph on the subject has yet to be written.

The emergence of the WFS

We can see the existence of a latent socialism in Thessaloniki as early as the last years of the 19th century.²³ However, we have to wait for the Young Turk revolution of July 1908 –which seems to have been born in the Macedonian capital – and for the intense workers' agitation which followed it to see socialists organizing themselves, adopting as their main support Jewish and Bulgarian workers.

Officially, the WFS – the main socialist organization of the city – was born, as we have already noted, only towards the end of spring 1909. Nevertheless, the process which resulted in its creation was set in motion as early as the summer of the preceding year, with a strike, in August, of longshoremen which totally paralysed the port for some days. Then everybody joined in the movement: telegraphists, workers in the tobacco processing-factories, carpenters, tailors, bakers, cobblers, tramway employees, bricklayers, tilers of the Allatini factory, the 120 employees of the Olympos brewery, soap-factory workers, confectioners, shop assistants of the department store Orosdi-Back, ironmongers of Benforado factory ... Within a few weeks, Thessaloniki newspapers note some 20 cases of strikes. Their intensity varies. Only 22 workers go on strike at Benforado's, in the hope of obtaining an increase in wages; on the other hand, there are thousands of strikers on the Thessaloniki-Alexandroupolis (Dedeağaç) railway and in the Allatini enterprises. But the most spectacular movement is probably that of café and restaurant waiters. When they go on strike, on 10 September 1908, it seems as if the heart of the city has stopped²⁴

If Thessaloniki is on strike, it is because strikes appear to pay. To win their case, workers do not merely stop work and organize marches through the city with music and banners at their head; they also contact members of the CUP and bargain persistently, making use alternately of threats and concessions. Exulted by the spirit of the revolution, the contestants exhibit exceptional pugnacity.

This is the climate in which socialism was gradually to implant itself in Thessaloniki. It was unavoidable that the supporters of this ideology, constantly growing in number in the Balkans, should try to take advantage of the situation. As early as the end of August 1908, workers of tobacco factories created a trade union, which the *Rabotničeski vestnik* of Sofia hastened to present as an organization devoted to the

propagation of revolutionary ideas.²⁵ A few days later, militants of the BWSDP took the initiative of founding a 'mixed union' which incorporated a kind of think-tank. Members of this group – among them Nikola Rusev, Emerich Fiala, Dimitar Tochev, Ivan Pockov and Nikola Kasabov – were almost without exception practitioners of the fast growing profession of typographer. As soon as it was organized, this group embarked on an ambitious programme of public lectures. At the same time, its militants devoted themselves to the launching of socialist literature. Their best-seller was the *Calendrier rouge du peuple* (Red Calendar of the People), printed in Sofia. Hundreds of copies of this calendar were sold within a few months in Macedonia.²⁶

However, at that time, in the Balkans, a socialist organization could hardly be created without there appearing immediately a rival faction. In Sofia, two important factions – the Broad and the Narrow, besides other small groups – were competing for the proletarian votes. Thessaloniki would not act differently. Nikola Rusev and his comrades were the spokesmen in the capital of Narrow socialism, of a Marxist tendency. Almost simultaneously, another group was formed: it originated, for its part, from anarcho-liberalism.²⁷ Bulgarians were in a majority within this group, as witnessed by the list of its leaders, which includes the names of Nikola Harlakov, Pavel Delidarev and Angel Tomov, among others. But the new organization also counted some Jews, united in a group called the Sephardic Circle of Socialist Studies. This circle was directed by a young typographer and former schoolmaster, originating from Vidin: Abraham Benaroya. He came to Thessaloniki soon after the Young Turk revolution and within a few weeks gathered around him a first core of supporters.

Curiously, the 'anarcho-liberals' and the Narrows at first banked on mutual agreement and created a united group with Nikola Rusev acting as secretary.²⁸ However, very rapidly, the Bulgarian socialist press was able to forecast a storm:

Dark clouds appear on the horizon and announce a violent tempest. The behaviour of Pavel Delidarev, of Abraham Benaroya and company has become unbearable. Our comrades know perfectly well that the ground of the union becomes more and more slippery.²⁹

Towards mid-March the disagreement became public. The chronicle of Balkan socialism was enriched by one more split.

What was the cause of the conflict? The explanations given by the *Rabotničeska iskra* (Workers' spark) – a newspaper published in Sofia by an adherent to the Narrow party, Vasil Glavinov – are very hazy: according to him, the group was disrupted by individuals who wanted 'to make use of workers for the benefit of their personal interests'.³⁰ More concretely, it would seem that the storm was the creation of a 'club of workers' with a practically exclusively Jewish membership. Abraham Benaroya would say later on in his memoirs that this club was situated over an Albanian restaurant on the Egnatia Street and that it at the beginning comprised about 30 members: some typographers, five or six workers of tobacco-processing plants, shop assistants, and half a dozen tailors who followed someone of their own trade: Abraham Hasson. Despite its modest size, the new organization already had a symbol proudly embossed on all the documents of the group: a worker's hand holding a hammer.

Thessaloniki's population would learn to recognize this hand and this hammer from 1 May 1909, when they would be stupefied by the sight of the first workers' mass demonstration in the history of the city.³¹ The manifestation was all the more spectacular as the socialists on this occasion succeeded in suspending their quarrels and in mobilizing the militants of all the ideological groups. The crowd was made up of Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks and, especially, many Jews. It is clear that Benaroya and his people were constantly gaining ground.

However, though the feast was successful, it was but a general rehearsal. One and a half months later, on 19 June more than 6000 people marched through the city in response to the call of the Workers' Association of Salonica (the name temporarily given to Benaroya's group) and of various other organizations. After having decked out the piers and the Egnatia Street from one end to the other with colourful banners, the columns of demonstrators assembled on the Selimiye Avenue, in front of the port's large buildings. Their objective was to protest against a bill proposed by the Ottoman government intended to limit the right to strike and trade unions' liberties. According to the *Journal de Salonique* of 20 June, the meeting had assembled the workers of the cigarette-paper factory and soap factories, shop assistants, typographers, carpenters, cobblers, longshoremen, tobacco-processing workers, employees of Eastern Railways, those of the tramway company, of the gas works, tailors – that is to say, a large proportion of the Thessaloniki proletariat. The success of the demonstration would lead Benaroya and his deputy, Abraham Hasson, the day after to advise the

ISB, established in Brussels, in glowing terms that an unprecedented event had taken place in Thessaloniki and that the Workers' Association of the city desired to become, in association with the Bulgarian socialist group, the Ottoman section of the International.³²

Now, Benaroya and his comrades had the wind in their sails. As early as mid August the Workers' Association took on a new label, that of the Workers' Socialist Federation. At about the same time, a 'great international workers' fair' organized in the gardens of Beşçınar yielded 100 golden Turkish liras as a result of the sale of 6000 entrance tickets.³³ This money would allow the publication of a 'Workers' Newspaper' in Judeo-Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Bulgarian.

The term of 'Federation', applied from then on to the organization, had not been chosen at random. What the leaders of the movement had in mind was to enable distinct groups, generally organized on a 'national' basis, to collaborate in a kind of league, with the ultimate objective of creating a unified party. That is what Benaroya explained to the ISB in a long report of July 1910:

... The Ottoman nation is composed of numerous nationalities living on the same territory and having each a different language, culture, literature, customs and characteristics. For the ethnic and philological [sic!] reasons, we have considered that it is desirable to form an organization to which all the nationalities might adhere without abandoning their own language and culture. Better still: every one of them will be able to develop independently its culture and its individuality while working for the same ideal: the socialist ideal ...³⁴

The idea seemed sound, and the Federation soon profited from it. A small Muslim core adhered in August 1909 to the Jewish element, which formed the large majority of the organization and to the Bulgarian, less numerous but very active. This core was directed by the chief editor of *Amele gazetesi*, Rasim Hikmet and a small Greek group, one of the promoters of which, I. Gazis, published the *Ephimeris tou ergatou*.

The world of the left in Thessaloniki was to be joined by the left wing of the *National Federative Party*. This had originated in the IMRO and was represented in the Ottoman Parliament by Dimitar Vlahov, one of the most noted spokesmen of Balkan socialism. On the other hand, Benaroya's Federation progressively built up a network of correspondents and maintained friendly relations with the Serb socialist

party, the Greek socialist centre of Istanbul, the Paole-Sion of Palestine and the two main Armenian revolutionary movements existing in Ottoman territory: the Dashnak and the Henchak parties.³⁵

However, though the base of Benaroya's organization was constantly becoming broader, its leaders were forced to face at regular intervals the prevailing disease of Balkan socialism: factionalism and splits. The most serious crisis in this respect would result in November 1909 in a mass departure of Bulgarian militants. A first disagreement had taken place in the autumn of the previous year, when the Federation had not yet been established. Now, however, a real divorce occurred.

Once more, the origin of the conflict seems difficult to define. It was again Vasil Glavinov who launched the offensive in *Rabotničeska iskra*:

In agreement with certain careerist Bulgarian socialists, the local Jewish committee engages in an anti-worker and lower-bourgeoisie policy, propelling our organization towards our bourgeois enemies ... The Federation neglects the socialist education and transforms its quarters into a tavern in which the already declining workers' conscience is submerged completely ...³⁶

A few months later, the same Glavinov, in a report addressed to the ISB, will go still further, stating that the Federation is a creation of Young Turks:

... You admit into the International not some kind of socialist party or a simple workers' organization but, on the contrary, under the name of a Socialist Federation which does not exist in reality, a branch of the governmental party of Young Turks, or at least, its most devoted men such as Vlahov and tutti quanti ...³⁷

What must we think of these accusations? In his memoirs, Benaroya says that the split occurred as a consequence of a great public demonstration organized in commemoration of the Catalan revolutionary Francisco Ferrer, whom a Spanish court had condemned to death and who was executed in October 1909. It would seem that Bulgarian social democrats could not bear to see the Jewish workers' unions mark this occasion by marching in the streets of Thessaloniki side by side with the 'representatives of the bourgeoisie', in particular with Freemasons.³⁸

More specifically, it would seem that the split had been produced by the attitude of the Federation to the national question. In the opinion of Narrow Bulgarians – who declared that they were supporters of a revolutionary class organization and wanted to avoid the dispersal of proletarian forces – Benaroya's venture betrayed the interests of the proletarian class. The greatest error of the Federation was to have introduced into its organization the federative principle which 'keeps alive nationalist prejudice among the workers'.³⁹ To this criticism – theoretically justified – the Workers' Federation of Salonica opposed for its part a pragmatic approach to Ottoman realities, an approach near enough to that of Austro-Hungarian Marxists, which seems to have inspired the Thessalonicians.⁴⁰ For the Federation, the essential point was to maintain the multinational structure of the empire. It did not consider it necessary to relegate class antagonism to the background, but thought that it was enough simply to formulate conditions of the social struggle while taking into consideration the ethnic and religious diversity of the Ottoman territory, a fact that could not be neglected, especially in Macedonia.

For Glavinov and the Narrows, the federalist strategy of the Federation was an anti-proletarian deviation. Confronted with these attacks, Benaroya's organization stressed its claim to socialism. This was a common debate within the Balkan context at the beginning of the century, when there was constant rivalry between the moderate and the radical social democrats. As a matter of fact, in spite of the accusations formulated against it, the Federation was neither a lower-bourgeoisie party, nor an instrument of the CUP, but an organization that fully deserved to be part of the Socialist International. Its socialism, which displays the influence of Jaurès and of the French socialists, but also – through Bulgarian translations – that of Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian socialists (of Marx and Engels to be sure, but also of Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Plekhanov, Lenin etc.), was of a very genuine standard for its time. Contrary to what was claimed by the Narrows of Glavinov, Benaroya and his supporters refused to compromise with the Thessalonician class of employers. It seems that they were stubbornly fighting the 'mutual unions' created by the latter.⁴¹

As to the alleged complicity of the Federation with the party in power, this accusation does not bear serious scrutiny. It is true that during the few months of 'freedom' that followed the revolution of July 1908 – a period that some people have called the 'honeymoon' of Young Turk power – the workers' organization of Thessaloniki

displayed its sympathy for the CUP. Here are some instances: it was on a list made up of Young Turks that Dimitar Vlahov was elected to the Ottoman parliament;⁴² Benaroya participated with enthusiasm in the Young Turk expedition which left Thessaloniki to oppose the clerical counter-revolution of April 1909 in Istanbul;⁴³ on the occasion of the first anniversary of the revolution, the workers of Thessaloniki, marching with a brass band behind red banners, showed their massive support for the Unionists.⁴⁴ But, in the context of Thessaloniki, these expressions of support for Young Turks were in no way suspect. By their actions, the militants of the Federation merely expressed their recognition of the progressive character of a movement which, since its arrival to power, had always proclaimed its intention to follow a policy based on social justice and the fraternal cohabitation of peoples. Furthermore, the goodwill of Benaroya's organization towards the Young Turks does not express an unconditional support. Although the Federation approved of the positive achievements of the revolution, it still preserved its critical sense. After the first moment of exultation, it appreciated the real character of the Young Turk authority and kept aloof from it.

The struggle against the CUP

Deserted in autumn 1909 by the Bulgarian militants, the Federation henceforth presented a very clear picture. It was 100 per cent Jewish, even though it had Greek and Turkish supporters, and even though the National Federative Party of Dimitar Vlahov had injected into it a little Slav blood. The experience of a press in four languages lasted only a few months. From then on, Benaroya published his newspapers and booklets only in Judeo-Spanish. All his assistants – Alberto Arditti, Abraham Hasson, David Recanati, Joseph Hazan, Saul Nahum – belonged to the Jewish community. Finally, it was only on Jewish unions (in particular the union of tobacco workers) that the organization depended for its strength. While underlining his attachment to the federal ideal, Benaroya recognized in his letters to the ISB that the Jewish proletariat of Thessaloniki constituted its main breeding ground.

In spite of the departure of the Bulgarians, the Federation had five or six thousand supporters. On paper it seemed an impressive score, and the Macedonian metropolis was acclaimed in the ISB bulletin as the capital of Ottoman socialism. But the truth is that, since the end of 1909, Thessaloniki's militants were no longer in a very good position. The Young Turk government, deeply disturbed in April by the attempted

clerical counter-revolution, gradually organized a repressive apparatus that left the workers' organizations no room for manoeuvre.

The CUP did not forgive the workers for the strikes which flared up throughout the country during the last months of 1908. Neither did it appreciate the frankness of certain newspapers. It had been frightened also by the proliferation of political parties. Consequently, on its initiative, several repressive laws were voted from June to August 1909: the 'law on political meetings', which controlled strictly the organization of popular demonstrations; the 'law on press and publishing', which instituted a kind of censorship; the 'law on associations', forbidding the constitution of political organizations on an ethnic or national basis; the 'law on strikes' which repeated the essence of the provisional law promulgated on 15 October 1908 by the Council of Ministers in order to oppose the wave of strikes that followed the July revolution and forbade strikes of workers in enterprises with a public character. It was no longer allowed to express freely popular discontent. The primary objective was to stop the disorder and to ensure a safe development of business.

At the same time, faced with numerous crises abroad (the proclamation of Bulgarian independence, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria, the seizure of Crete by the Greeks) and in the interior (the slaughter of Armenians in Anatolia, a renewal of hostilities in Macedonia), the Young Turks began to turn to nationalism. In Thessaloniki, men close to the inner circles of the Committee – Ziya Gökalp, Ömer Seyfeddin, Ali Canip and some others – violently criticized the prevailing cosmopolitanism and preached 'Turkism'. From the beginning of 1909 onwards, nationalist publications spread widely the new doctrine. In 1910, at the Congress of Union and Progress, the 'Turkists' succeeded in having part of their programme adopted: the government was to encourage the Turkification of the state apparatus, implant Turkish immigrants in regions with a Christian population and promote a new cultural policy in order to extend the use of Turkish language. Henceforth, Ottomanism was but a window dressing intended to put at ease the Western powers.

Obviously the rise of Turkism and the anti-worker measures of 1909 constituted a grave threat to Ottoman socialism. Under the circumstances, the Federation could only keep aloof from the CUP. The break occurred probably in the last months of 1909. In its report of July to the ISB, the Thessaloniki organization vehemently denounced the autocratic, nationalist and anti-worker policies of the authorities.⁴⁵ For its part, the government increased its harassments and on the basis of the

state of siege promulgated after the suppression of the April 1909 counter-revolution, it took severe action.

The first of May 1910 was a sad occasion. The Narrow Bulgarians, more and more hostile to the 'Jewish committee', celebrated the day behind closed doors in their office. The Federation published an entire newspaper in red ink but its call for a general strike went unanswered. There was just one consolation that day: the famous Christian Rakovski, one of the great intellectual masters of Balkan socialism, accepted an invitation to come to Thessaloniki. First on the Place de la Liberté, then in the Café Cristal, he delivered in French and in Bulgarian a moving lecture on the Balkan confederation and the working class. According to Benaroya, this event caused a considerable stir, polishing the Federation's blazon, which sorely needed it.⁴⁶

Towards the end of 1910, even more alarming news from Thessaloniki reached the ISB. 'The Young Turk movement proceeds to hypocritical and crafty persecutions,' wrote Saul Nahum, the representative of the Federation in Paris:

The syndicate of tobacco workers has been banned.⁴⁷ The premises of Salonica organization are closed by decision of the administration. Benaroya is once more imprisoned,⁴⁸ the militants are subjected to various pressures. In Istanbul, things are no better. The Ottoman socialist party created some months before by a group of publicists has been forced to cease its activities and its paper, the *Istirak* [Socialism] no longer appears.⁴⁹

Curiously enough, it was during this extremely difficult period that the BWSDP and the leaders of the Federation, reconciled for the occasion, took the initiative to convene a 'Conference of the Socialist Organizations of Turkey' in order to create a unified party.⁵⁰ In the first days of January 1911, 29 representatives met in order to discuss the future of Ottoman socialism. Most of the delegates were Thessalonians or militants who came from the Macedonian hinterland. There were however two outsiders among them: S. Papadopoulos, representative of the Greek socialist circle of Istanbul, and A. Pavlovich, who attended in the name of the Serbian Social Democrat Party.

The *Solidaridad obradera* provides us with the agenda of this conference. We are informed that the militants who met in Thessaloniki discussed the country's political situation and endeavoured to lay the foundations of a federative organization uniting all socialist groups of

the empire. We also learn that the debates mentioned relations between the unions and the socialist movement, as well as the organization of the militant press in Turkey. The resolutions published in extenso shed light on the vitality as well as on the weakness of Ottoman socialism. By way of introduction, the militants participating in the congress issued a moving appeal to the Socialist International, asking for support 'in the struggle of the Ottoman proletariat against the reaction'. At the closure of the congress, the authors of various final motions would also find adequate words to denounce 'the colonial policy of conquest pursued by European capitalists' and to call the working class to union under the aegis of the International. It would seem, however, that, with the exception of these moments of unanimity, the congress did not go too well: the two rival organizations of Thessaloniki did not fail once more to display their divergences.

What were the results? Practically none, or, in any case, sufficiently few to make the responsible members of the Federation decide not to refer to the matter in their correspondence with the ISB. The unified socialist party of Turkey would not be created. The Ottoman government would not be intimidated by the appeals of Thessalonican trouble-makers to international solidarity. Ideological quarrels would be taken up again.

In spite of all this, and of the successive failures registered by the new-born Ottoman socialism, the Federation would organize on 1 May 1911 a mass demonstration such as the city had never yet seen. 'Over 14 trade unions had responded to the appeal of our Federation,' says the enthusiastic report addressed to Camille Huysmans a few days later:

A great number of workers who were not members of the union have also taken part in the movement. Because of the work stoppage of all the odd-job men – carters, boatmen, longshoremen and stevedores – all movement has been suspended in our city. This forced most of our employers to close their shops and to take part in the festivities, be it only as onlookers. In the morning we organized a meeting in a large café in our city ... In the afternoon there was a great demonstration. About a thousand workers, seven to eighty years old with music at the front, led the march of an immense column comprising all the workers who were members of unions and a great number of those who were not. Various nationalities which compose our population were represented, something which made a great impression. The procession passed

through the main streets of our town stopping at the most crowded places ... Our comrade, the deputy Vlahov, gave a remarkable speech on the Place de la Liberté in front of an audience of 20,000 people.⁵¹

Twenty thousand demonstrators on the Place de la Liberté! Three times more than during the great marches of 1909! The Federation was all the more entitled to express its satisfaction – even though the figures given to the ISB were somewhat exaggerated – when after a few months, it published a new paper, the *Solidaridad obradera*, which appeared in 3000 copies. Was that not sufficient proof of the acceptance of socialist ideals by the population of Thessaloniki?

However, if the leaders of the Federation again and again send messages full of optimism, they also do not stop giving bad news. In June 1911 we learn that Benaroya, who had recently been released, has again been arrested and exiled to Serbia without trial.⁵² A little later, four other militants will be treated alike.⁵³ Progressively, a real climate of witch-hunting is being introduced in the empire.

Desirous to avoid a test of strength that could result only in a defeat for the Ottoman socialism, the ISB already at the beginning of 1911 advised the leaders of Thessaloniki to negotiate with the authorities through different personalities and through Free-masonry.⁵⁴ The advice was followed. The Federation appealed not only to Jaurès but also to De Pressencé, president of the League of the Rights of Man, to M. Baxton, president of the Balkan Committee of London, and to Marcel Sembat, who agreed to transmit a memoir to the Masonic movement.⁵⁵ For his part, Huysmans appealed to an Ottoman personality with a good name in Europe, Ahmed Rıza, the president of the Istanbul Parliament.⁵⁶ This went to prove that the character of Unionists was not well known. Indifferent to the pressures exerted upon them, they continued to harass socialists, multiplying measures of intimidation. And the Thessalonians were not the only ones targeted. The Muslim socialists of the capital were also attacked: İsmail Faik, former director of the *İnsaniyet* (l'Humanité), was exiled to Ankara; Hüseyin Hilmi, the founder of the party and Ziya Şevki, former director of *Jeune Turc*, were sent to Kastamonu.⁵⁷

It does not seem however that the persecutions – be it simple harassments or arrests of leaders – had intimidated the Federation. According to letters exchanged between Thessaloniki and the ISB, Hazan, who was entrusted with the leadership in the absence of

Benaroya,⁵⁸ was able to sustain the organization's activities. The *Solidaridad obradera* continued to appear; Vlahov was still a member of Parliament; In August, tobacco workers, in the majority in the Federation, organized in Kavála, in the presence of Vlahov, a congress of 4000 persons, during which a decision was taken to create a 'central committee of Ottoman tobacco-workers' unions'.⁵⁹ In spite of his absence, Benaroya's organization was alive and well. On the occasion of the Tripoli crisis, it even succeeded in organizing two great demonstrations. The first, which took place on 10 October 1911, was attended by 6000 persons; the second, on 4 November, by 10,000.⁶⁰ During these demonstrations the leaders blamed the imperialist policy of Western Powers and stressed their Ottomanist ideal. In the resolution published at the conclusion of the meeting of 4 November, they proclaimed, at the instigation of Rakovski, who had come from Sofia for this purpose, the need to work for the constitution of a Balkan confederation, in order to maintain peace in the region.⁶¹

Naturally, the meetings of Thessaloniki did not in any way constitute support for the policies of the CUP, even though the latter inspired the WFS to protest against Italian aggression in Tripoli. Henceforth, the Federation turned towards the 'Entente Libérale', the coalition of the discontented. The OSP of Hüseyin Hilmi and the Armenians of the Henchak chose the same way.⁶² Clearly, it was not with any pleasure that these various organizations agreed to co-operate with the class enemy – and all the less so as certain elements of the Entente Libérale seemed even more reactionary than those in power. But the matter was urgent. Confronted with a disintegration of their majority in Parliament, the Unionists decided on 17 January 1912 to resort to holding early elections in order to gain control of the Assembly. The Federation wanted to block their way and to ensure the victory of the opposition. This consideration was of the first importance.

The material at our disposal, in particular the correspondence of the Federation with the ISB, the *Solidaridad obradera* and Vlahov's memoirs provides us with a detailed account of this period in the history of Thessaloniki's organization.

The Federation joined the battle of the elections in the last days of January. In order to vanquish the CUP, it came to an agreement not only with the Entente Libérale but also with Greek and Bulgarian national groups.⁶³ During the campaign it organized great popular demonstrations and published in Turkish an election newspaper, the *Mücadele*, distributed in several thousand copies. Vlahov, the candidate

appointed by the opposition bloc, went on a tour of Macedonia which, according to him, was a triumphal march.⁶⁴ But the Unionists had no intention of losing the elections and resorted to the use of force. Benaroya, who had returned from Serbia, was again arrested on 22 February. In March, most of the militants of the Federation were treated in the same way. Vlahov, for his part, was forced to give up his electoral meetings.⁶⁵ In the circumstances, the defeat was, of course, unavoidable. Vlahov was not re-elected; the new Assembly inaugurated on 18 April contained but a handful of members of the opposition. The Federation was at the mercy of the authorities.

Henceforth, the iron fist of the Unionists took over from the velvet glove. True, the Federation militants were liberated immediately after the elections, but on the other hand the Committee did not hesitate to make use of the repression apparatus at its disposal. The authorities dispersed demonstrations, banned the socialist press and forced Unionist administrators upon trade unions.⁶⁶ It was out and out war. In April 1912 Cavid Bey, the finance minister, gave a speech in Thessaloniki at the laying of the foundation stone of the new central railway station. He hinted in this speech that decisive measures would be taken against socialists, declaring that the newly born Turkish bourgeoisie could not tolerate the existence of workers' organizations. It was necessary, in the first place, to protect the interests of capitalists, who were 'the true protectors of the workers' class'. Later on it would be possible to think of syndicates and parties, but for the time being Turkish industry must have a free hand. He promised that those who disturb public order and threatened the economic life of the country would be punished and announced that the Committee would submit to Parliament a bill in order to put an end to socialist subversion.⁶⁷

The Unionists would have no time, however, to put their threats into practice. As early as July, they lost power because of the forceful intervention of a group of officers, a kind of operetta military putsch. Authority passed to the Entente Libérale. For the Federation, after months of persecution, it was a moment of triumph. The new government handed back the archives confiscated by the Unionists and it would seem that its intention was to leave the group in peace. Other organizations of the empire (in particular the OSP of Hüseyin Hilmi) were treated with the same benevolence.

But this revival, which corresponded to a period of crisis and weakening of the central government's power, was superficial. As a matter of fact, it marked no change whatsoever in the relations between

the ruling class and the workers. The few strikes that occurred in the summer of 1912 resulted, almost without exception, in disaster for workers. Clearly, the Liberal Entente had no intention of letting the socialists do what they wanted.

The Federation and the Balkan wars

If the new government displayed a relative benevolence towards socialists, the latter were now faced with a much more threatening situation, that of a general cataclysm in the Balkans. From the summer of 1912 onwards, the correspondence between the WFS and the ISB deals mainly with this war, first probable, then unavoidable. The *Bulletin périodique du BSI* and the other socialist periodical papers of Europe overflow with proclamations, demonstrations and circulars ... Balkan socialists were unanimous in their condemnation of war, even if they did not always agree on means to avoid it.⁶⁸

Among the most significant documents of this period we must mention the 'Manifeste des socialistes de Turquie et des Balkans', addressed to the workers of the Balkan peninsula and of Asia Minor, which appeared immediately before the war. This manifesto was written by Christian Rakovski in early September 1912. The Romanian socialist leader was in Istanbul at that time and had come to an agreement with Ottoman organizations, mainly with the Armenian socialist parties and the Federation, for the publication of a common proclamation which later on would receive the support of all the countries of the region.⁶⁹

Like other 'manifestoes' published at about the same time in the Balkans, this text (one of the most consistent analyses of the Balkan problem at our disposal) recognized the right of nationalities to an autonomous life as a 'direct consequence of political and social equality and of the suppression of privileges of caste, race or religion, required by the Workers' International'. On the other hand, the text condemned categorically the economic and territorial expansionism of Turkey's neighbours. It stressed that a change of the political map of the Balkans because of the ethnic dispersion in this part of the world would only 'change the name of the masters and the degrees of oppression'. Consequently, the authors of the manifesto opted for the maintenance of the territorial status quo in the Ottoman Empire but – possibly inspired by the doctrine of 'administrative decentralisation' recommended by Prince Sabahattin⁷⁰ – they demanded complete autonomy for the nationalities in the cultural domain – schools, churches etc. – and local

self-government by region, canton and commune, with proportional representation of ethnic elements and parties.⁷¹

But while this manifesto of 'Ottomanist' character was supported by all the socialists of the Balkans, in reality such 'unity' was a sham. Most of the Balkan movements no longer believed in maintenance of the status quo. In particular, the Unified Social-Democrat Party of Yanko Sakasov in Sofia, in a report of 14 September 1912—before the war had even started—pleaded for an autonomous Macedonia, with Thessaloniki as capital.⁷²

It would seem that Benaroya and his comrades were the only ones to continue believing, even after the fighting had begun, that the map of the Balkans would remain unchanged and that peace could be re-established by means of a policy of mutual confidence endeavouring to form a confederation of Balkan peoples. It was only progressively, after some delay, that the Federation accepted the new situation in the peninsula and in particular the annexation of Thessaloniki by the kingdom of Greece.⁷³ In March 1913, when the war was in full swing and Thessaloniki had no longer been part of the Ottoman Empire for several months, Joseph Hazan, one of the most faithful assistants of Benaroya, made an 'Appeal to the socialists of all countries' representing his organization as the vanguard of the workers' movement of Turkey.⁷⁴

Hoping that Turkish forces would regain control, the federation proclaimed in its correspondence with the ISB its attachment to the maintenance of the status quo until the end of the first Balkan war. This relentless defence of a lost cause can be explained largely by the fact that the Federation was a mainly Jewish organization and that, unlike other Balkan parties, it had no national demands to make. The main objective, as far as it was concerned, was that Thessaloniki, a rich and active city, should preserve its prosperity. Its militants, like other Thessalonican Jews, had two main reasons to desire a return to the pre-war situation. First, an economic reason: they thought that the trade and industry of the city were too dependent on the Macedonian hinterland and on the Ottoman market to be able to adapt to the new circumstances in the Balkans. The second reason was that, being Jews, they feared being placed under the power of an intolerant 'Christian' authority. The 'Turkish yoke' their community had been subjected to for centuries had not been a particularly light one. But the relative peace which they had enjoyed until then was a precious gift which might easily be lost if their masters changed.

It was only after the spring of 1913 that the Federation, under the pressure of circumstances, decided to change its course. It appears from its correspondence with the ISB that at the time it came round to the idea of autonomy for Macedonia, an autonomy inserted within the framework of a hypothetical Balkan confederation.⁷⁵ This formula, which had been recommended by numerous publicists as early as the end of the 19th century, is in the Federation's opinion a last resort. It would allow Thessaloniki to preserve an economic position very like that it would have enjoyed in the event of a return to the status quo. At the same time, it had the advantage of sparing Macedonia the ethnic and religious conflicts that the political partition imposed by the Balkan powers would provoke.

Towards the end of 1913 it would seem that the Federation had begun to orientate itself towards a final adjustment of its position. It was becoming less and less likely that Macedonia might one day achieve unity, in whatever form. Thessalonican militants were therefore forced to face the facts as they stood and to adapt themselves to Greek rule. On the eve of the First World War, the Federation still, if we can believe the accusations of Greek authorities, looked to the Balkans. But this did not prevent it from becoming increasingly interested in events in Athens, and numerous links already brought it closer to various Hellenic socialist groups that had been formed on Greek territory.⁷⁶

The 'Hellenization' of the Federation represented another chapter of its history, which we are not going to explore here. Founded in 1909, at the dawn of the revolution that seemed to bring in its wake the regeneration of the empire, the Federation experienced with the Balkan collapse of 1912-13 a kind of first death. After many years of constant efforts to promote solidarity among peoples, the Federation was forced to admit the reality: all those efforts could not prevent the eruption of different nationalisms. Its struggle for stability and mutual understanding in the Balkans constituted only a symbolic gesture in the face of this grave crisis. Manifestations, conferences, great meetings in Thessaloniki did not influence the course of events at all.

Must we therefore see in the evolution of the Federation between 1909 and 1913 only a story of failure? This would be most unfair. During the four years that separated the Young Turk revolution from the occupation of Thessaloniki by the Greeks, Benaroya's organization had registered quite a few successes. It had contributed to the creation of several unions; presided over important strikes; spread wide the socialist message thanks to its publications and to its meetings. To it must be

credited the organization in Thessaloniki in January 1911 of a *unitarian* conference that assembled most of the socialist formations of the empire. It would seem that it had actively worked in 1912 for the formation of a 'General Union' of Ottoman workers' associations. Its main error was to bet on the survival of the empire. Had it been more clear-sighted on this point, it would have avoided false hopes and saved itself many useless speeches.

