

The Economic Climate of the 'Young Turk Revolution' in 1908*

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This revolution did not come from below, from debased city mobs or ignorant peasantry, but from above, from all that is best in Turkey.¹ (1909)

It is a sign of the times that, whereas it has been impossible in the past to bring the Turkish masses into line against the throne, because to them it represented an intangible Idol, semi-religious, semi-political, they have been awakened by their sufferings into a nation of solidarity, the underlying element of which is a new-born spirit of criticism in regard to the Sultan-Caliph.² (September 1908)

On a dit partout-et tout le monde l'a cru--que le blé faisait absolument défaut en Turquie et que la famine était à nos portes.³ (January 1908)

A profound disequilibrium, arising from the industrialization of Europe and its quest for raw materials, foodstuffs and markets, confounded the world in the early 20th century. From a global perspective the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, as well as World War I, are European indicators of a more widespread inability among social and political systems of the underdeveloped states to absorb the onrush of economic and technological change. In China, Persia, the Ottoman Empire and Mexico outbreaks of violence, varying in intensity and outcome, proclaimed the universality of the strains accompanying the deepening European economic penetration of the world.

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¹E. F. Knight, The Awakening of Turkey. A History of the Turkish Revolution (Philadelphia, 1909), 114.

²A. Rustem Bey de Bilinski, "The Turkish Revolution," The Nineteenth Century and After, LXIV, September, 1908, 354.

³Revue commerciale du Levant, bulletin mensuel de la chambre de commerce française de Constantinople (hereafter Revue), Nr. 250, 1/1/1908, 192.

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The Ottoman Empire confronted these challenges earlier than most areas. Massive imports of machine-made European goods began in the late 1830s, undermining the Ottoman handicraft system and gradually weakening the guilds while the development of export-oriented agriculture inexorably transformed cultivator relations with the world outside the village. The pitch of European penetration intensified in the two decades before World War I. Railroads probed deep into the interior of Ottoman provinces and more tightly bound the expanding agrarian economy to world market needs. The spread of European corporative enterprises in the empire, for its part, brought along an unfamiliar work day and discipline. These cumulative innovations and intrusions corroded Ottoman values, traditional relationships and the assumptions upon which the government interacted with its subjects. Ottoman "institutions at all levels--social, economic, ideological, political--were attacked and destroyed or drastically modified."⁴

These secular tensions finally exploded in a phenomenon called the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Whether or not this outbreak constituted a "real" revolution is uncertain:⁵ we do not yet have enough information to make a conclusive assessment. Little is known about the Ottoman actors, even the famed intellectuals and officers. In the case of the Young Turks, the term revolution denotes developments which began in July of 1908. Military officers sought to realize their hopes for a strong state and successfully demanded the immediate introduction of parliamentary government, free speech, press and association--restoration of the 1876 Ottoman constitution. But when the unleashed internal forces threatened to move beyond those political achievements and upset existing social and economic relationships, the Young Turks reversed themselves by outlawing strikes, restricting labor organizations and, ultimately, curtailing political freedom. A key to understanding this interplay of government and subject and even the transformation of post-World War I Turkey involves an analysis of the social and economic conditions at the time of the initial sequence of events in 1908. Our knowledge is critically scanty. On the social side, we are dimly aware that a new professional bureaucracy, an often-rich but politically impotent merchant class, a group of cash crop cultivators, a small but growing European-style labor force and an artisan group in disarray had emerged, but detailed studies

⁴ Andrew C. Hess, "Consensus or Conflict: The Dilemma of Islamic Historians," The American Historical Review, Vol. 81 (October, 1976), 796.

⁵ For important insights into the place of the 1908 events in the typology of revolution, see Şerif A. Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 2 (July, 1971), 197-211. More generally, see, for example, the still useful Chalmers Johnson, Revolution and the Social Structure (Stanford, 1964).

are lacking. Scholarship concerning the economic milieu is similarly sparse. Before the constellation of post-July 1908 events can be understood, these lacunae in our knowledge need to be filled. This essay is a preliminary effort to make the political occurrences and relationships of the period more intelligible--by examining the economic climate in which the reinstatement of the constitution took place in 1908.

The present article differs from most studies of the Young Turk Revolution in both its geographic and topical foci. First, previous scholarship has stressed events in the European provinces, those from which the revolution erupted, but has ignored conditions both in the Istanbul capital and the financial and manpower heartland of the empire--the Anatolian provinces. This study focuses on Istanbul and Anatolia. Second, it investigates the economic conditions surrounding the outbreak of the revolution rather than the leadership and demonstrates that the early Summer of 1908 was a period of severe economic crisis. The intent here is not to detract from the notable achievements of the revolutionary officers and intellectuals (or their historians). Nor is it to establish a cast-iron causal link between economic crisis and political mobilization. Such an effort would require a broader investigation, one carrying the story forward at least to the actual 'seizure' of power by the revolutionary officers in 1913 and backward to similar economic crises in 1898/1899 or even 1873-1875. Yet to sketch the economic climate within which crucial political events occurred clearly should open this period of Ottoman history to new inquiry, insightful questions, and possibly new relationships.

During the eighteen months preceding the July 1908 revolution, the Ottoman population confronted a series of domestic and international economic crises. The crises began with a severe winter in early 1907 which raised the price of practically every comestible and made "the existence of the laboring class very difficult."⁶ By March, 1907, the Istanbul price of meat and staples such as legumes were double normal levels. Firewood was up 250 per cent over normal and charcoal had as much as tripled in price.

Poverty, horrible poverty of a sinister countenance, has taken possession of this city and it reigns as mistress; it appears impossible for us to dislodge it.⁷

A prolonged Spring drought then sharply reduced the grain harvest in many European, Anatolian, and apparently, Arab areas of the empire and according to some observers, threatened to bring famine. By August, pessimists were estimating

⁶ Revue, Nr. 240, 3/31/1907, 530-532. Translations are the author's.

⁷ Ibid. and Nr. 238, 1/31/1907, 236. Ömer Sami Coşar, hazırlayan, Atatürk Ansiklopedisi, I (Istanbul, 1973, hereafter Atatürk Ans.), 386, for reports based on Sabah, 3/29/1907.

Anatolian wheat and barley harvests 50 and 40 per cent below normal.⁸ The government responded and, between August and October 1907, forbade grain exports from six Anatolian regions and from all the European provinces. It also suspended the duty on foreign wheat imports to Istanbul while reducing the foreign flour duty by nearly half.⁹ The brief but severe American financial crisis then added to the prevailing uncertainty by causing Istanbul and Anatolian bankers and merchants to tighten their credit.¹⁰

Food provisioning prospects in early 1908 appeared promising and the year started with optimistic assessments of the next harvest. Gradually, however, area after area, in a pattern repeated throughout much of the empire, abandoned those rosy predictions and replaced them with harsher, if more accurate, prophecies. On the edge of Asia along the Dardanelles, continuing drought into late June produced numerous religious processions to seek the intervention of Providence.¹¹ Further afield in Anatolia, similar conditions prevailed. The town of Merzifon reported the crop of 1907 as 50 per cent below normal and the situation by April, 1908 was critical.

Every bag of flour, every bite of bread, has cost the local consumer just about double the usual prices, and that makes a very hard condition for the poor.¹²

The new governor of nearby Kastamonu province on the Black Sea reduced bread prices in a number of urban centers during April and May; rains in late June reportedly saved the population from disaster and local bread prices were expected to remain stable until the harvest.¹³ The Aegean municipality of Izmir

⁸ Revue, Nr. 244, 8/31/1907, 152. Le journal de la chambre de commerce de Constantinople (hereafter JCCC), 10/12/1907, 473, placed the wheat decline at 20 per cent for Anatolia and 33 per cent for the European provinces.

⁹ Hariciye Arsivi (Foreign Office Archives, Istanbul) Dosya 191 also records a 19 September 1908 prohibition on cereal exports from certain Arab areas. Also see Revue, Nr. 247, 10/31/1907, 608; Nr. 246, 9/30/1907, 393-395; and Nr. 253, 4/30/1908, 588.

¹⁰ For example, Revue, Nr. 248, 11/30/1907, 197-198; Nr. 250, 1/31/1908, 149; and Stamboul, 7/15/1908.

¹¹ Levant Herald (hereafter LH), 6/24/1908, 2. For reports from Edirne and Selanik in the European provinces which reflect the increasing drought, suffering and pessimism, see LH, 1/13, 1; 2/17, 2-3; 4/27, 2; 5/21, 3; 6/2, 3; 6/19, 2 and 6/23/1908, 3. Stamboul, 6/2; 6/4; 6/26; 7/4; 7/9/1908.

¹² LH, 4/1/1908, 1.

¹³ LH, 5/7, 3; 5/25, 3; 5/26, 1; 5/30/1908, 3. Stamboul, 7/2/1908.

responded to its own crisis in late May, 1908 by making "small" or "notable" reductions in bread and meat prices, depending on which observer is to be believed. In mid-June, reports of discontent, stemming from the persistent drought, began emanating from the usually rich hinterland of the port city.¹⁴ Inland, June and July rains lowered wheat prices at the railroad town of Eskişehir; in the week of the revolution, however, their levels remained double those of the previous year. Normal wheat exporters such as this area and the Adapazar region further up the line were importing wheat for their own needs.¹⁵ Harvest reports from Konya, also on the railroad, generally had been good. But in late June, despite recent and abundant rains, residents were said to "fear the drought and also famine," and the governor prohibited grain exports.¹⁶

Elsewhere, in the central Anatolian town of Sivas, wheat prices in January, 1908, stood at 257 piasters/kile of 165 okkes, the highest level in thirty-five years. After dropping by twelve per cent in late February, they rebounded to new heights in the first week of June while inhabitants formed processions to mosques and churches and prayed for rain. A week later, rains did come but prices still crept upwards, to a level 24 per cent higher than in January.¹⁷ On the morning of June 23, women from neighboring villages came into the town, protested the price and quality of flour and demanded bread. By noon, some 500 townspeople joined the women at the government house, stoned the building and smashed its windows. The crowd then ransacked the grain warehouses and confronted a military unit unwilling to open fire. Towards evening some 60 persons with wheat in their homes were arrested and the riot apparently subsided.¹⁸

At Kayseri, the 1907 crop had been about one-third below normal. Flour which had sold for 3-4 piasters/batman of 17 lbs. av. in mid-1907 had tripled in price by November; then, with better weather in December it declined, to 7-8 piasters. Although good rains fell in mid-May 1908, the drought resumed and on June 12, the inhabitants were "suffering enormously... from the extraordinarily high price of flour."¹⁹ While 12,000

¹⁴ LH, 5/25, 2 and Sabah, 5/24/1908, 1; LH, 5/26, 1 and 6/17/1908, 2. See Atatürk Ans., I, e.g. 297, 396-397, for accounts of military and civilian unrest around Izmir dating back to 1902.

¹⁵ Stamboul, 5/21; 6/16; 7/6; 7/10; 7/23/1908.

¹⁶ LH, 6/25/1908, 2-3 and Stamboul, 5/29/1908.

¹⁷ LH, 1/22, 2-3; 2/5, 2; 3/5, 2; 6/1, 3; 6/17, 3; and 6/24/1908, 2; piaster--monetary unit, nominally one-hundredth of a Turkish pound; kile--unit of measure; okke--unit of weight, 2.8 lbs. av..

¹⁸ Atatürk Ans., I, 404-405 after reports of the French consul.

¹⁹ Stamboul, 6/23/1908. Also, LH, 1/24, 1; 5/20, 3; 6/27/1908.

persons gathered to pray for rain, the local government intervened and sold subsidized flour, but at the level of 13 piasters. On June 15, a correspondent reported on affairs in the town. "Seldom have I seen such a constant watching of the sky, such a deep longing for the 'latter' rain." By then, flour prices were about quadruple those of the previous year.²⁰

Near the east-central Anatolian town of Erzurum, authorities were aiding some villagers with exemptions from the usual duties on imported grain.²¹ There, the people had been in varying stages of unrest since 1906. A taxpayers' revolt in 1906-1907 had resulted in the destruction of the government building, the killing of several officials, the wounding of the governor, and the refusal of some officers to suppress the rising. Erzurum again exploded in September, 1907 when bread prices "suddenly" doubled. A crowd stormed the properties of flour merchants, lynched one and badly wounded two others. Again some military personnel refused to act. The central government took the initiative in October, imprisoning or executing rebel ringleaders while exiling disobedient officers.²² The sources then fall silent on events in Erzurum but, from September 1907 until the following May, bread prices remained more than double their earlier, normal, levels.²³

A distinct pattern emerges from this survey of events in the Anatolian provinces. Wheat/flour/bread prices shot up after mid-1907, then slipped very modestly at the end of the year in expectation of the future harvest. Prices, however, never fell from the late 1907 plateaus and then rose to new heights as widespread drought again became evident. Many areas, with the increasing certainty of a second consecutive crop failure, possessed only the thinnest of margins against the growing possibility of famine. For the regime, the continuing deterioration mocked its subsidy programs and made the policy of arrest and exile increasingly hazardous.

Conditions in the imperial and favored city of Istanbul reflected those in the provinces and affected all classes of the population. As 1908 began most commodity prices still were well above normal. Fruit and vegetable prices remained 25 per cent, firewood 58 per cent and charcoal 250 per cent above the levels prevailing at the beginning of the 1906-1907

²⁰ LH, 6/27/1908; also sources cited in n. 19 above.

²¹ Sabah, 2/20/1908, 1 and LH, 2/20/1908, 2. Not far away, at Harput, "Prices of almost all articles of food are double the prices of ordinary years." LH, 6/25/1908, 1.

²² Atatürk Ans., I, 358-360, 380-383 and Mehmet Nusret, Tarihçe-i Erzurum (Istanbul, 1328), 57-71 which forms the source of the encyclopedia account.

²³ LH, 4/10, 3; 4/22, 2; 5/7/1908 and Atatürk Ans., I, 382. Also flour prices cited in the above newspapers as well as in LH, 5/28, 3 and 6/24/1908, 3. For bread riots in the Arab provincial centers of Aleppo and Beirut in November, 1907, see Atatürk Ans., I, 384, after reports of the French consuls.

winter crisis.²⁴ In addition, the city suffered a meat shortage during the Winter of 1907-1908 and the Spring of 1908. In January, 1908, the price of mutton, consumed mainly by the middle and upper classes, was at least 50 per cent above normal. By March, the price of meat had reached "unbelievable figures."²⁵ The shortage was attributed to a variety of factors including the export of animals, the increasing conversion of pasture to cropland, high fodder prices, and a combination of heavy snows, prolonged drought and epizoots in both European Turkey and Anatolia.²⁶

The municipal administration, in January, began setting meat prices on a weekly basis as the imperial government ordered the provinces to ship their herds to the capital.²⁷ Through March and April 1908, Istanbul newspapers lavished extensive coverage on the shipment of animals to the city, for example, precisely enumerating the arriving animals. By mid-April, thanks in part to the receipt of sheep from Syria, the crisis apparently had passed.²⁸ Reports now focused on the disappearance of epizoot from the various areas.²⁹ Still, in early May, one newspaper could report that the "rise in meat prices constitutes the general preoccupation as does that of all other objects of alimentation."³⁰

²⁴United States, Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Manufactures, Monthly Consular and Trade Reports (hereafter U. S. Monthly Reports), January 1908, 202-203 and Revue Nr. 240, 3/31/1907, 530-532.

²⁵LH, 3/18/1908, 2; Revue cited in n. 24 above. For meat prices during March-June see: Sabah, 3/7, 2; 3/27, 1; 4/5, 1; 4/6, 1; 4/17, 2; and 6/14/1908, 2; and LH, 3/18, 2; 3/27, 2; 4/8, 1; and 4/27/1908, 1.

²⁶Sabah, 2/12, 2; 3/18, 2; 3/27/1908, 1-2 and LH, 4/8/1908, 2. Zentrales Staatsarchiv, Potsdam, Auswärtiges Amt (hereafter ZStA, AA), Nr. 6722, Bl. 70. See Sabah, 2/27, 1-2; 2/28, 2; 3/7, 2; 3/12, 1; 3/15, 2; 3/18, 2; and 3/26/1908, 1 for government counter measures.

²⁷LH, 1/28, 3; 2/18, 2; and 3/28/1908, 1-2. Sabah, 3/11, 2; 3/26, 1; 4/5, 1; and 4/8/1908, 1.

²⁸Several meat purveyors to the army contracted for the shipment of 30,000 sheep from Syria to the capital, a measure winning them the gratitude of the press, later provisioning contracts and, probably, considerable profits. See, for example, Sabah, 3/25, 1; 4/2, 1-2; 4/6, 1; 4/17, 2; and 6/14/1908, 2; LH, 3/26, 1; 3/27, 2; and 4/2/1908, 1.

²⁹Sabah, 6/14, 2; 6/17, 2; 6/22, 1; 6/24, 2; 6/29, 1; and 7/20/1908, 1-2. Also LH, 4/23, 2; 4/24, 2; 5/12, 2; and 6/3/1908, 2. For contrary reports or indications of epizoot revival, see LH, 6/29/1908, 3; Stamboul, 7/7/1908, and Atatürk Ans., I, 404.

³⁰LH, 5/8/1908, 2. For "buffalo" meat sales in Izmir, see LH, 3/27/1908, 1.

While confronting and apparently resolving the meat shortage, Istanbul faced another, most serious, crisis of food supply. The upward spiral in the price of wheat, flour and bread severely threatened the well-being of the broad Ottoman masses for whom bread was the major item of consumption: the average Ottoman ate an impressive 2.2-3.0 lbs. av. daily.³¹

During the several decades preceding the crisis being related here, Istanbul wheat prices had fluctuated according to a certain pattern. Usually, average monthly prices rose or fell moderately, within a range of \pm 10 per cent, with an increase during one month generally being offset by subsequent seasonal price declines. Annual price fluctuations commonly were of modest proportions. In 1907-1908, however, the pattern was broken; the divergence began in the late Spring of 1907. As evidence of a poor crop accumulated, the average April wheat price of 38.31 paras/okke jumped to 43.00 in June. Nervousness in the market mounted and when prices reached 50.50 in September, trading temporarily ceased. At this juncture, the government intervened with its measures to assure bread supplies. When trading resumed, however, prices continued their upward course and, in the final three months of the year, averaged 41 per cent above the April price (with a peak of 55.40 paras/okke in November). During the year, the average quarterly wheat price had advanced steadily from 36.77 to 40.74 in the second quarter, rising to 46.06 and, in the final quarter, to 54.19 paras/okke.³²

The fixed price of bread, determined after negotiations between the municipality and the bakers' guild, rose accordingly. After the first wheat price increase, the "years old" fixed retail price of 40 paras per loaf of standard weight bread was moved up to 45 in June 1907. In September it was allowed to increase again, to 50 paras.³³ By the end of 1907, bread and wheat prices respectively had increased 25 and 45 per cent in six months.

³¹For bread consumption patterns see, for example, Revue, Nr. 256, 7/31/1908, 156; ZStA, AA, Nr. 53736, Bl. 39 and U. S. Monthly Reports, January 1909, 71.

³²Prices derived from semi-weekly market reports in JCCC, 1907, and calculated in constant value monetary and weight units. Forty paras equal one piaster. Prices are for Ankara Nr. 1 wheat; other grades follow similar price trends. A table stating average annual prices for standard grade wheat in Istanbul, 1876-1908, is available from the author. Generally, prices fell during the late 19th century price depression and gradually rose after 1896. The indexed table shows that if wheat cost 100 in 1906, it had risen to 123 in 1907 and 145 in 1908.

³³JCCC, 7/20/1895, 339; Ataturk Ans., I, 386-387. In referring to loaf weights, French language papers in Istanbul usually stated kilogram while Ottoman language sources alternatively employed kilogram and okke (of 1.28 kgs.). Ikdam, 8/27/1908, 2 and Revue, Nr. 257, 8/31/1908, 322, make clear that the weight standard is the kilogram and not the okke. Pressure on bread prices already was evident in 1906; see, e.g., Revue, Nr. 227, 2/28/1906, 247-249.

In early 1908, Istanbul newspapers began publishing detailed reports on crop prospects in the provinces. If the intent was to reassure readers, the scheme must have backfired: generally, the news was bad. The international market had stabilized sufficiently in Istanbul, however, so that the year began with a fractional slippage in wheat prices. In its eagerness to regain lost revenues, the government reacted perhaps too quickly and, in February, repealed the export prohibitions as well as the reductions in wheat and flour import duties. Negotiations then lowered the fixed price of bread to 45 paras per loaf.³⁴ But as another poor season unfolded, Istanbul wheat prices, from the year's low of 49.25 paras/okke in late February, crept fractionally upwards through March, April, May, June, and July. During the first six months of 1908, they were 35 per cent higher than the year before. In the month of the revolution, wheat prices reached 55.00 paras/okke, their peak for the year. The bread price moved correspondingly and on May 7, rose to 50 paras, a level maintained until after the revolution.³⁵

Bread prices increased much more than the quoted statistics indicate. In this era of rising prices, Istanbul bakers felt caught in the squeeze between government efforts to keep bread prices at a minimum, and their own desire to maintain certain profit margins. In response, some bakers produced and sold shortweight bread. In the first five months of 1908, the municipality confiscated over 100,000 loaves which it considered underweight. On the average, the bread weighed 30 per cent less than the officially-set standard, an additional cost borne by the Ottoman consumer.³⁶ The quality of the bread also was declining. Normally, when indigenous sources dwindled,

³⁴ Sabah, 2/8, 1; 2/16, 2; 2/25, 1; 2/26, 1; 2/27, 1; and 2/28/1908, 1. LH, 2/26, 1; 2/27, 1; and 2/28/1908, 1. Hariciye Arsivi, Dosya 191, 2/2/1908; Revue, Nr. 251, 2/29/1908, 255 and Bundesarchiv (Koblenz) R2/1717, 2/26/1908.

³⁵ Bread prices in Bas Bakanlık Arsivi (Prime Ministry Archives, Istanbul, hereafter BBA), Bab-1 Ali Evrak Odasi (hereafter BEO) 247951; LH, 5/3, 1-2; 5/5, 2; 5/6, 1-2; and 5/7/1908, 1-2. Stamboul, 5/4/1908, 2; Sabah, 5/4, 1 and 5/7/1908, 1. Wheat prices for 1908 derived from JCCC weekly market reports according to procedures sketched in n. 32. The bread price rose immediately after the revolution, to 55 paras/loaf. The implications of changing food prices on relations between the Ottoman masses and the Young Turk regime are being studied by the author.

³⁶ LH, 1/28, 1; 2/19, 1; 3/5, 1-2; 3/19, 4; 4/21, 1; 5/18/1908, 1; 6/11/1908, 2; Stamboul, 7/1/1908; Atatürk Ans., I, 386. Revue, Nr. 227, 2/28/1906, 256 and Nr. 256, 7/31/1908, 156-157. Osman Nuri, Sehri Eminleri (Istanbul, 1927), 198-199, for stronger municipality measures to prevent weight fraud beginning c. early 1906.

wheat and flour imports helped to maintain low bread prices. In 1907, however, world wheat production slumped as many other countries suffered varying degrees of crop failure. The great American granary reported a 15 per cent shortfall in 1907 while in early 1908 a drought threatened its Spring crop.³⁷ More immediately important to the Ottomans was production in Bulgaria and Rumania, countries which normally were significant suppliers both in the international and Istanbul markets. In 1907, Rumanian output was down 63 per cent while Bulgarian production fell 40 per cent.³⁸ Istanbul millers and bakers therefore turned elsewhere and, in 1908, procured a record 73 per cent of the flour consumed in Istanbul from France (Marseilles) and Italy. These two sources provided a cheaper but lower quality flour than the Danubian, Russian or Ottoman areas.³⁹ The procurement of this less-expensive flour, although its price had risen 50 per cent in two years, made it easier to keep bread prices within the state-imposed limits.⁴⁰ But the widespread use of poorer-grade flours, coupled with the practice of short weights, did place the Ottoman consumer at a great disadvantage. Istanbul residents, in the several months before the revolution, were eating lower-quality bread, of lesser weight, and paying more for their loaves than at any time in the past twenty-five years.⁴¹ "Nos estomacs et nos bourses protestent."⁴² All the while, they received continuing

³⁷ Historical Abstracts of the United States, 511; JCCC, 10/12/1907, 473, indicate an 11 per cent decline in global wheat production between 1906 and 1907.

³⁸ United States, Department of Agriculture, Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture (Washington, 1909) and ibid., 1910, 606-607 and 444-445 respectively also note that world-wide wheat production in 1907 and 1908 was down about 8 per cent compared with the preceding two years. JCCC, 5/2/1908, 145, places the Rumanian decline, compared with average 1902-1906 levels, at 50 per cent.

³⁹ During the period 1889-1906, Marseilles and Italy typically provided 2-12 per cent of the flour consumed in Istanbul--1899 with 28 per cent and 1900 with 52 per cent are the only exceptions. In 1907, the two sources shipped 45 per cent. Market summaries in LH, 1889-1890, and JCCC, 1892-1908.

⁴⁰ Market reports in JCCC, 1906-1908. The procedures explained in n. 32 were employed to obtain flour prices.

⁴¹ This assertion is based partially on the record use of Marseilles and Italian flour and contemporary reports, e.g., Revue, Nr. 256, 7/31/1908, 159. Also, the table cited in n. 32 demonstrates that comparably high wheat prices had not prevailed in Istanbul since 1880-1882. For the direct linkage between wheat, flour, and bread prices see Ikdam, 8/17/1908, 2.

⁴² Revue, Nr. 256, 7/31/1908, 159.

if unfounded assurances that the situation was not worsening.⁴³

The uncertainty and high prices in the first half of 1908 were justified fully. The 1908 harvest was perhaps the worst since the killing famines of the mid-1870s: the year ended with widespread crop failures and near-famine conditions in many areas.⁴⁴ Several indicators such as the volume of rail and sea shipments of grain during 1907 and 1908 attest to the severity of the shortages.

The Anatolian Railway after its completion in 1895 had become the major Istanbul wheat (but not flour) supplier, annually shipping up to 94 per cent of that grain received in the capital. Annual average shipments of cereals rose from 238,000 tons during its first years of full operations, 1896-1901, to 310,000 tons between 1902 and 1906. With the 1907 crop failure, merchants in the interior drew on existing stocks and shipped 240,000 tons, down nearly one-fourth. By the Spring of 1908, stocks were depleted and grain shipments for the year plummeted, to 93,000 tons.⁴⁵

Declines are similarly if less clearly evident in cereal exports from the coastal centers of Mersin, Izmir and Samsun. During the period 1876-1906, grain shipments from these cities had risen considerably (at least 50 per cent). Annual average grain exports from the southeastern port of Mersin rose dramatically between 1876-1880 and 1891-1895, slipped during the 1898-1899 turnaround occasioned by crop failures and war but again increased, to perhaps twice the levels of the 1870s and 1880s, in the 1902-1906 period. During these five years, the

⁴³JCCC, the organ of the merchant community, optimistically manipulated statistics throughout the wheat crisis. Finally, in the 12/26/1908 issue, 405, it admitted that 1908 had been a "most difficult" year. The other newspapers, in their news sections, also often predicted a promising harvest but, in the same issues, letters from provincial correspondents indicated the reverse situation.

⁴⁴The 1907-1908 crisis derived its magnitude not only from internal Ottoman conditions but from the concomitant crop failures or shortfalls abroad. To compare conditions in 1907-1908 with those of earlier periods, see: Société du chemin de fer ottoman d'Anatolie, Bericht des Verwaltungsrathes über das... Betriebsjahr (1. Januar bis 31. December...) for the years 1889-1908 (hereafter Annual Report(s)); Great Britain, Accounts and Papers, Parliamentary Papers (hereafter A&P), reports on the trade and commerce of Smyrna/Izmir, Samsun, Trabzon and Adana/Mersin, 1876-1908.

⁴⁵Istanbul bread continued to derive mainly from flour milled abroad: see my article, "Limited Revolution: the Impact of the Anatolian Railway on Turkish Transportation and the Provisioning of Istanbul, 1890-1908," Business History Review, Summer, 1977, 139-160. Annual Reports, 1889-1908. Cereal shipments fell below those of 1908 only once, in 1899, after crop failures in 1898 and 1899 and when the railroad still was relatively new.

annual value of Mersin cereal exports averaged 293,000 British pounds but in 1907, even with inflated prices, declined to 193,000 pounds. Cereal shipments from Izmir had risen steadily and, in 1906, were at least double those of three decades before. Between 1902 and 1906, they annually averaged 571,000 British pounds but in 1907 and 1908, fell to 328,000 pounds (again with higher prices). At the Black Sea port of Samsun, the value of cereal exports in the late 1880s and early 1890s was approximately twice that of the preceding ten year period but then slipped badly between 1902 and 1906, to about the level of the early 1880s. In 1908, exports fell further, to 23,000 British pounds, about one-third the annual average level of the preceding five years and one-ninth that of Samsun's best export half-decade.⁴⁶

Loan statistics of the Agricultural Bank, a government agency providing low-interest credit to cultivators, also reveal the depression in Ottoman agriculture during 1907-1908. While secured bank loans annually averaged 679,000 Turkish pounds between 1902 and 1906, their value rose to 1,097,000 pounds in 1907 and to 1,143,000 pounds in 1908. Perhaps a better indicator of the crisis are bank loans to those unable to furnish real estate as collateral, a group usually ignored by the bank and to which it annually lent, between 1902 and 1906, only 40,000 Turkish pounds. In 1907 and 1908, the annual value of such unsecured loans rose more than six fold.⁴⁷

The available concrete evidence of unrest triggered by these grave and deteriorating economic conditions has been summarized above. Although this documentation is relatively sparse, a reflection, perhaps, of the lack of research, contemporary reporting and/or actual passivity, it does suggest widespread provincial discontent and distress. In Istanbul, signs of unrest also are visible among the workers, a group which had been in a fairly favorable position. In a possible

⁴⁶ A&P reports on the trade and commerce of Smyrna/Izmir, Samsun, and Adana/Mersin and Revue, Nr. 253, 4/30/1908, 598. The 1907 Mersin exports, originally reported at 157,000 pounds, were revised upwards to 193,000 pounds.

The available sources suffer from several major deficiencies. First, exports often are given under the general rubric "cereals," which include wheat, barley, maize, and oats. Second, the export statistics most often are stated in units of monetary value and not weight or measure. Third, we have annual price data for Istanbul but not the three ports. Actual production figures do exist for the region as well as some provinces but not in a sufficiently continuous series. Furthermore, the sources employ terms--Anatolia, Asia Minor and Asiatic Turkey--which are not necessarily interchangeable. And finally, the fundamental accuracy of both region-wide and provincial figures is questionable.

⁴⁷ Yusuf Saim Atasagun, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası, 1888-1939 (Istanbul, 1939), tables on 261 and 345. For loan assistance to cultivators at the end of 1908, see BBA BEO 258442, 259441, and 259832, and ZStA,AA, Nr. 15052, Bl. 55. Policy changes introduced by the Young Turk government account for some of the increases.

response to the worsening economic conditions, Ottoman railroad workers established a union on October 30, 1907.⁴⁸ The next day, the Oriental Railway Company raised its workers' daily wages and "accepted" salary increases for its officials while, at the end of the year, the Anatolian Railway Company created a pension fund for its employees. Istanbul dock workers agitated in July 1907 and mid-June 1908 and, on the earlier date, some apparently lost their jobs after seeking pay increases.⁴⁹ During the first half of 1908, office workers in the capital sought to organize but, fearing the "great risks," gave up the effort until after the revolution.⁵⁰ Public health employees there received 10-15 per cent raises in late February 1908, an action one newspaper lauded as exemplary if, unfortunately, unique in the city.⁵¹ Another indication of discontent is an imperial decree of early June which ordered the immediate payment of a month's salary to state employees and officials.⁵²

In the absence of more complete data on the wages of Ottoman urban workers, average family size, frequency of supplemental income within a family and/or second jobs for household heads, the impact of food price increases can only be approximated. Before the 1907-1908 downturn, the average common laborer, if unmarried and supporting only himself, used 10-15 per cent of his income for his own daily bread needs. Railroad workers at the lower end of their occupation's pay scale, as well as some printing house workers, devoted 14-19 per cent of their wages for bread. Skilled laborers such as bricklayers and carpenters spent only 5-6 per cent.⁵³ If we then assume that the above workers had a family with wife and two children

⁴⁸Stefan Velikov, "Sur le mouvement ouvrier et socialiste en Turquie après la révolution jeune-turque en 1908," Études Balkaniques, 1964, Nr. 1, 41. Growing consciousness among the workers, noted by Velikov and others, surely played a role as well.

⁴⁹Atatürk Ans., I, 387, quoting the newspaper Moniteur Oriental, 11/12/1907. Annual Report, 1907, 8. BBA BEO 231817, 250105, and 250219.

⁵⁰Stamboul, 8/22/1908; ibid., 8/20/1908 indicates a March 1908 formation of an international association of commercial employees in Istanbul.

⁵¹LH, 2/25, 2; 2/27/1908, 1; and Sabah, 2/25, 1; 2/28/1908, 2.

⁵²LH, 6/10/1908, 2.

⁵³The percentages are for Istanbul workers' wages related to Istanbul bread prices. Annual Reports, clipping from an unspecified 1908 magazine in collection of the Deutsche Bank, bound after the reports. ZStA,AA (Merseburg), Rep. 93, Abt. E, Nr. 396, Bl. 107r; A. Gabriel, Les dessous de l'administration des chemins des fer ottomans d'Anatolie et de Bagdad (Istanbul, 1911), 131; Stamboul, 8/12/1908. Tevfik Cavdar, Millî Mücadelenin ekonomik kökenleri (Istanbul, 1974), 129-130.

and provided the whole family income, we can obtain a notion of what the bread price increases might have meant to some families. The common laborer in such a situation initially would have devoted 40-60 per cent of his income to bread needs and, other things equal, 50-75 per cent by July 1908. Similarly, railroad workers and printing house employees would have been paying 56-76 per cent of their wages for bread before the crisis and an implausible 72-100 per cent thereafter. For skilled laborers, bread now would have drained about 25-30 per cent of wages. Put more simply, all individuals, regardless of income and marital status, were paying 25 per cent more for their bread in July 1908 than 13 months earlier and few enjoyed even partially compensating wage increases.

Considering other necessities such as rent and other minimum food and clothing needs, some of these statistical calculations strain credibility. There is no indication in the materials available for research on this essay how the spending pattern of workers as a group changed in response to the extraordinary and sometimes absurd proportion of income needed just for bread. There were presumably some consumption substitutions. Some families had two or three breadwinners while the statistical illustrations assumed only one. Other workers may have borrowed from relatives, from moneylenders, or obtained retail store credit. And some simply may have eaten less.

The wage hikes noted above were the exception; more generally, "neither profits nor salaries have followed the upward tendency [in prices]..."⁵⁴ Most wages remained fixed during the inflationary period, a reversal of what one writer has described as a rise in real wages during most of the half century before the revolution.⁵⁵ Ottoman workers were less well off in July 1908 than they had been for several decades and were confronting a sharp, sudden decline in their level of living.⁵⁶ One theorist suggests that a long period of relative

⁵⁴U. S. Monthly Reports, January 1908, 203.

⁵⁵Charles Issawi issued a preliminary report on "Wages in Turkey, 1850-1914," to the "First International Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey, 1071-1920" held at Hacettepe University, Ankara, July 11-13, 1977. He noted that at the turn of the century, real wages for common laborers were almost "twice as high as those of 1850" and those for "skilled laborers perhaps one and a half times as high." Fragmentary information, however, suggests little increase in real wages after the end of the 1873-1896 price depression. Compare, for example, the 1908 wages of common laborers in Izmir noted by Issawi with those of "day laborers" in 1896 cited in United States, Department of State, Bureau of Statistics, Special Consular Reports, "Money and Prices in Foreign Countries," report by Consul Madden of Smyrna/Izmir, 8/26/1896, 209.

⁵⁶Revue, Nr. 257, 8/31/1908, 233-236, discussed the outbreak of strikes after the revolution and said that to understand the workers' position several factors, including the rising cost of living and unjustifiably high prices which made it impossible to live on some of their former salaries, had to be considered.

prosperity followed by a "short period of sharp reversal" creates a "gap between expectations and gratifications which quickly widens and becomes intolerable."⁵⁷ At this juncture, violent action ensues. Whether the relative prosperity of decades and its sudden turnabout in the 1907-1908 crisis predisposed the Ottoman urban workers to violence or change cannot be determined here but the question is posed as a spur to further research.

For the rural masses, the shortfalls of 1907-1908 hardly represented a unique experience: deprivation, impoverishment and the cycle of abundance followed by want were familiar phenomena. Also, crop failures and price rises of seemingly comparable magnitudes had occurred within living memory, most recently, in 1898-1899, without sparking revolution. Therefore, the economic setbacks in 1907-1908 cannot be viewed as the sole motive force of the revolution. What seems new in July 1908 is that an economic crisis unfolded in the presence of an organized, widespread revolutionary cadre. For the first time in decades, there was a favorable juncture of economic and political conditions.

In sum, this preliminary investigation has indicated a second side to the prerevolution days of 1908: a rapidly deteriorating economic environment, restiveness among workers, a suffering and sometimes riotous rural population, and an abiding pessimism for the future harvest. The existence of direct contacts between elements of these various urban and rural groups and the Young Turk officers is uncertain. Although the officers clearly acted in a socio-economic climate favorable to success, it remains a matter of conjecture as to whether or not the revolution would have occurred in the absence of such a climate. To summarize the case: international financial crisis, extreme cold, drought, crop failure (both domestic and international) and epizoot created unstable economic conditions and pushed food prices to unprecedented heights on the eve of the revolution. Prospects in July 1908, before the new harvest and when stocks were low, seemed grim, with little hope for improvement. Frustrated urban workers faced a declining standard of living. There was little reason for either the urban or rural populace to aid a regime apparently unable to alter conditions.

The economic conditions favoring the Young Turks in July 1908 also created the backdrop for the subsequent evolution of government-subject relations. The acquiescence of the populace to the July events carried with it implicit expectations of economic benefits which were translated into action during the following weeks when new workers' organizations and strikes proliferated. Government repression stifled the expectations and, nine months later, the disappointed population supported the unsuccessful counter-revolution of the Sultan. The present study, by establishing the economic setting of the 1908 revolution, suggests that the flow of events in Young Turk and early republican Turkey can be made more sensible if the tie between economic conditions, popular expectations, and government action is explored further.

⁵⁷ James C. Davies, "The J-Curve of Rising and Declining Satisfactions as a Cause of Some Great Revolutions and a Contained Rebellion," Hugh D. Graham and Ted R. Gurr, eds., Violence in America, revised edition (New York, 1970), 690-730.