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Learning the Ropes: The Young Turk Perception of the 1905 Russian Revolution

MURAT YAŞAR*

Our country is not mature enough to be governed with a constitutional monarchy. It will be disastrous for us as this method of government requires equality among individuals ... Our empire is composed of Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Vlachs, and Jews. These peoples will not be willing to renounce their judicial independence and right to govern their own churches ... Our Young Turks are dreamers because proclaiming a constitution and constitutional monarchy in our country is an invitation for disorder and pitting everyone against each other. This will shake the entire Ottoman Empire.¹

Ottomans! Learn a lesson [from the Russians]. Unlike the Russians, you were never enslaved. You were always free. Yet, today you seem to have been more enslaved than the Russian *muzhiks* (peasants) ... No one among you rebels. You should know that the right of living comes with honour and freedom. Because of this apathy you have, the whole world considers us a dead nation. All the nations, from the greatest to the smallest, are assaulting us to plunder our inheritance.²

In the early twentieth-century world of the monarchical empires, constitutional movements were a spatially and temporally contagious disease and neither the Russian nor the Ottoman Empire was immune to it.³ The year of 1905 saw the strongest autocracy in the world, the Russian Empire, shaken to its foundations by a constitutional revolution. Perhaps realizing that his turn might come next, Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) penned the first quote above when the unnerving news of the 1905 upheavals in the Russian Empire was received in the Yıldız Palace. He might have surmised that had a similar constitutional revolution occurred in his realm, the Ottoman Empire would have been no more. On the contrary, the Young Turks, the main opposition group to Abdülhamid II's rule, followed the same news enthusiastically and yearned to see a similar struggle for a constitutional regime in the Ottoman Empire as exemplified in the second quote above taken from a Young Turk journal. Essentially, both Abdülhamid II and the Young Turks shared the same objective, that is, to save

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the Ottoman Empire by protecting its territorial integrity and eliminating economic and political intervention of foreign powers. While the former thought that the only way to save the empire was to rule it with an iron fist, the latter was convinced that the empire could only be saved with a constitutional regime which would open up the way to progress and modernization.⁴

The oppressive regime of Abdülhamid II coerced the Young Turks into forming communities of Ottoman dissidents in Europe and Egypt. With more constitutionalists fleeing from the Ottoman Empire and joining their ranks, Young Turk activities in exile intensified. One of the ways for them to make their plea heard by the Ottoman public was the press. For this reason, Young Turk journals mushroomed in cities such as Paris, Geneva, London, Brussels, Sofia, Berlin, and Cairo. Despite the sultan's efforts, urging France, England, Switzerland, Germany, and Egypt to close down these journals or offering money to printing houses to stop their publication,⁵ they were continually smuggled to and covertly circulated in the Ottoman Empire.

This article will examine how the Young Turks perceived the 1905 Russian Revolution through the lenses of two important expatriate Young Turk journals, namely *Şura-yı Ümmet* and *Türk*. *Şura-yı Ümmet* was one of the mainstream Young Turk journals published by Ahmet Rıza's faction in Cairo and Paris as of 1902 as an instrument of the struggle for the liberation of the Ottoman Empire from foreign intervention and from its own despots as well as the restoration of the 1876 Ottoman constitution.⁶ The journal *Türk* was published in Cairo between 1903 and 1907 with an agenda of defending the rights of the Turks, rejuvenating Turkish ideals, and promoting Turkish nationalism as an ideology by Ali Kemal, Şerafeddin Mağmumî, Necmeddin Arif, Esad Bey, and Celaleddin Bey.⁷

Indeed, one cannot speak of a monolithic Young Turk press for the period of 1904–6. The aforementioned journals differed in their ideologies and their programmes of opposition to Abdülhamid II. While the journal *Şura-yı Ümmet* promoted the more inclusive Ottomanist approach of the mainstream Young Turks, *Türk* endorsed an ideology of Turkish nationalism. However, both journals accorded much significance to and broadly covered the course of the 1905 Russian Revolution. While doing so, they compared the situation in the Russian Empire to the Ottoman Empire and drew lessons for the Ottoman constitutionalists and public. In addition to these, they were able to freely criticize the sultan and his regime. They were also instrumental in bringing the news of the 1905 Revolution to the Ottoman readers, mostly through foreign post offices which were not under the complete control of the Ottoman government.⁸

The main sources of these journals for the news about the 1905 Revolution were European news agencies, European and Russian newspapers, Turkic journals published in the Russian Empire, and telegrams cabled by Russian Muslims. Of Turkic journals, *Tercüman* and *Hayat* were so influential during the 1905 Revolution that Sultan Abdülhamid II asked Tsar Nicholas II to prevent the smuggling of these journals to the Ottoman Empire.⁹ References to the Russian newspapers in the aforementioned Young Turk journals included revolutionary, liberal, and conservative papers. To illustrate, one can find a reference to the conservative *Novoe Vremia* and to the revolutionary *Izvestia* in the same issue of a Young Turk journal. Moreover, these Young Turk journals acquired the news from the Russian Empire later than they could have and sometimes gave the dates inaccurately. One reason for these erroneous dates was of course the confusion of the Julian calendar with the Gregorian.

Lastly, some Russian names and titles were written inconsistently, which was probably puzzling for the Ottoman readers with no knowledge of the Russian Empire and its subjects.

The perception of the 1905 Revolution by the Young Turks should be understood within the framework of certain premises. First, the 1905 Revolution was portrayed as a successful revolution against an absolutist ruler and presented as an example for the Ottomans who desired to overthrow the *istibdad* (despotism) of Abdülhamid II. Second, the revolution and the establishment of a parliament in the Russian Empire were considered stepping stones for the Russians on the path of becoming a free nation. If the Russian Empire were to become ‘a free nation’, the Ottoman Empire would be the only autocratic nation in Europe. In this case, a constitutional Russia could take over the Ottoman Empire as the European powers would not stop a constitutional regime taking over an autocratic regime. Consequently, the Young Turks believed that the Ottoman Empire could sustain its existence and put an end to foreign intervention only if a constitutional monarchy was established. Fourth, notwithstanding the rivalry between the Ottoman and Russian empires, the Young Turks developed a sense of solidarity with the Russian constitutionalists and revolutionaries as from the Young Turk perspective both the Ottoman and Russian nations fought for the same ends. Lastly, they argued that a successful revolution had to be guided by the intelligentsia and supported by the people, especially the peasants, and the army. The present article will follow a chronological outline while analysing the Young Turk understanding of the 1905 Revolution based on these premises.

The first news of *iğtişaat* (upheavals) in the Russian Empire, including a plot to assassinate the tsar, appeared in the reports of the Ottoman ambassador in St Petersburg to the sultan as early as 24 July 1904.¹⁰ However, it was in December of the same year that the disorder in the Russian Empire entered the orbit of the aforementioned journals as elements of a broader revolutionary unrest. In its 15 December 1904 issue, the journal *Türk* praised the *zemstvo* movement of 1903–4 and their resolutions calling for a constitutional regime as an important step in the revolutionary struggle. The author rendered the *zemstvo* members as ‘people’s deputies’ and construed their resolutions issued at the end of 1904 as defiance of the oppressive policies of the tsarist government, maladministration of the officials, and inequality of the laws.¹¹ Furthermore, student demonstrations and their chants for freedom and constitution were covered with details such as numbers of the students that participated in the anti-tsarist protests and the tsar’s reaction to them. For example, the 22 December 1904 issue of *Türk* reported that following the protest of 3,000 students in St Petersburg and their dispersal by the Cossack regiments, the tsar announced the continuation of the old regime and his intention to pass the throne to his son with its full autocratic powers. Focusing on the tsar’s outright dismissal of his people’s demands, the author concluded, ‘this journal cannot make sense how millions of people are being whipped like a flock of sheep’.¹²

The proclamation of the 12 December *ukaz* (decree),¹³ which promised inclusion of people’s representatives elected by the government to the legislative organ, was depicted as the first victory of the Russian nation against its despot, and, as such, celebrated by the Young Turks. On 29 December 1904, the first page of *Türk* was reserved for the news explaining how the tsar was forced to implement reforms (*islahat*). Expressing the solidarity of the Young Turks, the journal stated, ‘We

ourselves know the very evil of oppression well . . . from which the Russian people are now suffering. Although we were supposed to be pleased about the despotism in the land of our rival and archenemy, we are not pleased, because we loathe oppression.¹⁴ This *topos* of solidarity with the Russians was not uncommon in the Young Turk press during the course of the revolution.¹⁵ The same column also stressed the significance of popular support for struggles against autocracy, ‘Look at what the uprisings of people brought about! A great empire was forced to issue declarations.’¹⁶

In addition to such dry narratives of the events and edificatory comments, some colourful details of the political milieu of the Russian Empire, representing people’s resentment towards the Russian nobility and autocracy and their readiness to take action, were also printed. For example, the journal *Türk* recounted a significant event that occurred in a theatre. While the tsar’s uncle, Grand Duke Aleksei, was sitting in a box and talking with the upper-class people around him, a man shouted at him saying, ‘Give us back our money. All of your wealth comes from the money seized from the peasants.’¹⁷

However, this was nothing compared to the incident that united the diverse political factions, unions, and students in the Russian Empire against Nicholas II. On 22 January 1905, described as ‘a grim day’ by the tsar himself in his diaries¹⁸ and known to us as Bloody Sunday, Russian soldiers fired upon the protesters marching to the Winter Palace to submit their petition to the tsar. Bloody Sunday received broad coverage in *Türk* and *Şura-yı Ümmet*. The 26 January 1905 issue of *Türk* reserved its front page to this atrocious event. It wrote that 400,000 workers¹⁹ marched to the Winter Palace under the leadership of 24-year-old²⁰ Gapon.²¹ The author of the article stressed that while the Cossack regiment and some other regiments gunned down the protesters and killed about three or four hundred, some soldiers refused to obey the orders to fire.²² This theme – the Young Turks’ expectation that in a constitutional revolution the army would eventually side with the people – was one of the most often repeated presumptions in these journals, as will be shown below. Accusing the tsar of turning a blind eye to his people and appraising the role of the intelligentsia in leading the nation, *Şura-yı Ümmet* described the Bloody Sunday scene even more vividly:

Thousands of destitute people including children, women, and the elderly oppressed by the autocratic rule and maladministration went to the tsar to whom they attribute divine traits and to his grace’s palace. Hungry, destitute, unarmed, and undefended, they kneeled on the snow and said, ‘. . . We reached a point that we prefer death to life. Kneeling on the ground, we took refuge at your exalted place with our children in order to receive an answer to our call of help for the improvement of our lives’. Having been quiet for a while, the tsar then talked . . . [He] answered: ‘Fire!’ Blood of the oppressed [people] was flowing on the northern snow . . . However, there was one thing that the bullets and swords of the soldiers, who had been defeated by Japan and now was winning against their own brothers, could never kill: thought.²³

Meanwhile, the Ottoman ambassador to Russia, Hüsnü Pasha, mentioned Bloody Sunday in his report dated 28 January 1905.²⁴ He informed the sultan that the Russian soldiers fired upon ‘the rebellious workers’ who went on strike and demanded various concessions from the tsar. The report also provided information on international reactions and condemnations of the Bloody Sunday incident.²⁵

In fact, being neighbours and fighting against the same enemy, both the sultan and the tsar cooperated to contain the revolutionary dissidents in their realms. According to the memoirs of Ali Haydar Mithad,²⁶ the progressive aura created by the *Tanzimat* reforms alarmed the tsar, who thought that ‘the sick man of Europe’ could recover from its illness of backwardness. He says that the tsar sent his ambassador, General Ignatiev, to Istanbul with orders to lobby against the reform plans. Tsar Nicholas II also advised Sultan Abdülhamid II that the constitution should be eliminated completely and the sultan should be autocratic.²⁷ This cooperation did not go unnoticed by the Young Turks. *İctihad*, another Young Turk journal, claimed that Abdülhamid II said, ‘If people attempt to rebel against me, they will find Russian battleships on the Beşiktaş coast and Cossack whips on their backs.’²⁸ The journal also stated, ‘The future of Russia is of vital importance for Turkey, because Russia is the sponsor and protector of not only Turkey’s but also the entire world’s autocratic rulers.’²⁹ For the Young Turks, the only remaining autocracies in Europe were the Russian and Ottoman empires. Whenever the European powers insisted on the implementation of new reforms or criticized his oppressive rule, the sultan pointed to Russia as an example to justify his rule and he cooperated with the tsar against the constitutionalists. For these reasons, the tsar was condemned not only for being a ‘bloody autocrat’ but also for trying to stop the progressive movements and developments in the Ottoman Empire.³⁰ To illustrate, *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote:

If humanity and society properly disciplined the tsar, today a revolution would not be spreading all over the Russian Empire like a clap of thunder that threatens the very existence of the Russian government . . . The tsar has now proved that he will be a friend of old Abdülhamid in hell.³¹

The sequence of events following Bloody Sunday was carefully watched by our Young Turk journals. Labelling the event as a massacre, *Türk* pointed out that students, soldiers, and workers immediately reacted against the government and that no one knew where the tsar was when it happened. It indicated that the tsar preferred to hide from his people rather than listening to them, just as Abdülhamid II did in the Ottoman Empire.³² In its 9 February issue, *Türk* wrote that the tsar decided to gather an assembly composed of the grand dukes under the presidency of Grand Duke Vladimir in order to take measures to deal with the people who were ‘ready to fight for freedom’.³³ Tsar Nicholas II’s reception of the worker representatives and his declaration of grief about Bloody Sunday were also mentioned to show that the tsar was also trying to ease the tension and fix his image.³⁴

Understanding the importance of Bloody Sunday as an event that might precipitate a revolution, the 6 February issue of *Şura-yı Ümmet* evaluated it in comparison to the Ottoman experience of a constitutional regime in 1876. According to this article, revolutionary ideas brew mostly in universities and students were extremely instrumental in spreading them among ordinary people. Arguing that tyrants could be brought to heel if revolutionary struggles could gain popular support and drawing lessons from the 1876 experience, *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote:

For a while, Russia has been on the eve of an explosion stemming from revolutionary ideas. Despite the fact that this idea of revolution in autocratic Russia,

where the tsar arbitrarily rules over 130 million people, is the work of the scholars and people, it spreads through universities . . . The Russian people determined by their love of freedom and the idea of a revolution . . . are ready to catch fire. It was one of these Russians . . . who blew up the famous and cruel absolutist, Minister of Internal Affairs Plehve. When the trial of this Russian, at the end of which the court was not able to give him a death sentence – [thanks to] those who gathered around the courthouse . . . is compared to the trial of Mithad Pasha, can it not be a proof for the movement of thought in Russia? . . . In fact, about eight or ten years before, a desire for the restoration of the [rule of] law came into being [in the Ottoman Empire] . . . However, this movement of thought was purged by spies and the police. These newly awakening ideas were cruelly crushed. What caused this? Either because of their lack of knowledge or of understanding, people somehow failed to support and take part in the aforementioned movement of thought. When a naval officer, Commander [N.L.] Klado, professed the shortfalls of the Kronstadt fleet . . . and that it could not resist the Japanese fleet . . . , he was arrested by the government . . . People organized protests outside the prison of this person who told them the truth. Then, the government had to free him. However, for 28 years, our people have not saved a single person who was arrested [for fighting] on their behalf.³⁵

As a result of the revolutionary upheavals, the position of the tsar was considered to be very precarious, which was cleverly expressed in a satirical verse printed in *Türk*, ‘*Hasılı istemiyorsa da bu gibi haleti; çar, naçar kabul etmeli islahati*’ (Although he does not actually wants this sort of situation to occur, the tsar helplessly has to accept [to implement] the reforms).³⁶ Moreover, in an article published in the 9 March 1905 issue of *Türk*, the author said that they predicted the current situation in their previous issues, but they failed to estimate the current scale of upheavals and the number of Russians fighting for their liberation. He continued:

Thus, the Russians began to revolt in order to make sure that the people will rule themselves and they demand this with their blood . . . What is dangerous in Russia is that the Russians are ready to die . . . The statue of autocracy in Russia is tottering. It will be brought down in the very near future.³⁷

In its 21 March issue, *Şura-yı Ümmet* published a commentary about how the constitutionalist movement in the Ottoman Empire could be rejuvenated based on the Russian example. Reporting Gapon’s words condemning Nicholas II after the Bloody Sunday incident in a way to remind the Ottoman public of its religious duty to fight despots, the journal stated that Gapon’s words should in fact have been said by a Muslim religious scholar (*ulama*) in the Ottoman lands as Islam required its believers to speak the truth and rise against oppressive rulers.³⁸ However, it was the Russian nation that rose against its despot. ‘What happens everywhere in Russia – in the classrooms of the universities, among the ordinary people, craftsmen, and workers – is a revolution’, wrote *Şura-yı Ümmet*.³⁹

Of all social classes, Young Turk journals preferred to stress the role of the peasants in the revolutionary upheavals of 1905. The demographic features of the Ottoman Empire could explain why these journals attached so much importance to the

peasantry. In the Ottoman Empire, peasants constituted the bulk of the population and there was no industrial worker class. For this reason, many articles about the history of the Russian peasants and their role in the 1905 Revolution appeared in Young Turk journals. *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote extensively about the situation of the provinces and peasants in the Russian Empire, stressing the recent peasant attacks on their landlords' manors. The main idea that the journal tried to convey was that peasants were the soldiers of revolutions against despots:

The situation of the peasants in Russia is heartrending due to the autocracy, cruelty and maladministration. Of fifteen–twenty million peasant families, only one-third can obtain the minimum necessities to survive. Hungry and half-naked, others have to go to the cities in order to earn a living . . . These hungry Russians coming from villages and cities are like mines and torpedoes ready to ignite with a little contact . . . These 'fire-spreading' masses are the tools and the engine that the revolutionaries desperately need.⁴⁰

The Young Turks understood that it was easy to spread revolutionary ideas among the peasants migrating to cities to work in factories. They believed that peasants were very much aware of the political milieu of their country and would not hesitate to take action to change it in line with their interests.⁴¹ *İctihad* also published an article on the rural history of Russia with an emphasis on the institution of the assembly of the land, *zemskii sobor*, pointing out that the peasants had an understanding of local government and assembly.⁴² For the Young Turks, 'the *muzhiks*, who used to consider the tsar the little son of God, are now shaking his throne'.⁴³

Another important benefit of turning the peasants against the imperial government was related to the fact that most of the soldiers in the Russian and Ottoman armies were conscripted peasants. As *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote, 'The tsar defends himself with his armed forces, which in fact is the most dangerous thing to do. It is only a few times that he might be able to use this force against the people. However, coming from among the same people, the soldiers cannot fight against their own sons, fathers, and brothers for long.'⁴⁴ As such, the Young Turks expected that the army would eventually turn against the despot and side with the people.

The third side of a successful revolutionary triangle was the intelligentsia. That the Young Turk opposition in 1905 was still largely an intellectual movement can explain their focus on the intelligentsia. Confirming the Young Turk idea that intellectuals were to be the leaders of a successful revolution, *Şura-yı Ümmet* argued that revolutions were provoked by the cruelty and autocratic character of the old regimes but guided by philosophers and writers.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the journal *Türk* emphasized the role of intellectuals with a focus on Maxim Gorky, who was portrayed as 'a hero among freedom fighters, a man of noble character that grew up among real people, and a citizen of civilization'.⁴⁶ Therefore, for the Young Turks of 1905, the formula of success for constitutional revolutions was the leadership of the intelligentsia and support of the people, especially the peasants and the army.

In the spring and summer of 1905 the importance of what was happening in the Russian Empire was better understood and the journals devoted more space to the revolutionary unrest, presenting it as a model for the Ottomans. *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote that the real threat to the Ottoman Empire would not come from Russia but

from its own autocratic rule. It continued, 'First, we have to look at our internal affairs and try to get on a [similar] progressive path to follow.'⁴⁷ In addition to mentioning sporadic disorders such as a bombing attempt on the Warsaw police director,⁴⁸ plundering of a marketplace, and freeing prisoners in Yalta,⁴⁹ *Türk* enviously stated that the papers in Russia already began to debate the nature of the parliament that was to be established. It also claimed that every attempt at reform in order to alleviate tension would no longer suffice as the Russian people now demanded a constitutional monarchy and nothing less.⁵⁰ In May 1905, an article in *Şura-yı Ümmet* expressed the frustration of the Ottoman constitutionalists, complaining that the Ottomans failed to take lessons and benefit from what was happening in the Russian Empire.⁵¹

It was also during these months that the severity of the situation in Russia was realized by the Ottoman government as well. The sultan was keen on getting up-to-date information about the developments in Russia. On 20 April 1905 a report dispatched by the Ottoman embassy to Istanbul listed the planned reforms and precautions of the Russian government in order to pacify the increasing tension.⁵² However, it was the mutiny of the battleship *Potemkin* from 23 June to 8 July 1905 that alarmed Abdülhamid II and the Ottoman government. The sultan was especially troubled by the possibility of the battleship anchoring at the Straits of Istanbul and spreading revolutionary ideas to Ottoman troops.⁵³ In fact, Ottoman officials in Istanbul informed the sultan that the battleship was en route to Istanbul and that the necessary measures, including placement of torpedo-boats along the straits, had been taken.⁵⁴ Moreover, Tahsin Pasha, the sultan's private secretary, remembers that Abdülhamid II ordered the artillery batteries located at the straits to be strengthened.⁵⁵

Şura-yı Ümmet described the *Potemkin* mutiny as 'a reflection of the internal situation of the Russian Empire and also an event that was reminiscent of the murders committed by the Hamidian government in the Ottoman Empire'.⁵⁶ Including the officers of the *Potemkin* battleship among the ranks of the mutineers and revolutionists, the journal *Şura-yı Ümmet* wrote that the officers had the booklets of the Sevastopol Freedom Society in their pockets and the soldiers had the principles of these booklets in their hearts.⁵⁷ The journal also claimed that Sultan Abdülhamid II, while ordering his officials to do everything to keep the battleship out of the straits and the Ottoman Empire, did not even have the military capability to impede a single battleship. The reason was that, fearing an uprising by the naval forces, Abdülhamid II had let the Ottoman fleet perish in the Sea of Marmara.⁵⁸

A report submitted to the sultan from St Petersburg on 7 July, in the last days of the mutiny, analysed the causes of the mutiny and provided details such as the names of the mutineers and of their officers.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the *Potemkin* problem was not over for Abdülhamid II when the battleship surrendered to the Romanian authorities at Costanța on 8 July 1905. The mutineers were granted the right of asylum in Romania in accordance with the agreement they reached with the Romanian government. Following this, Abdülhamid II was informed that some of these mutineers came to Istanbul on Romanian passports. He was worried that these people might spread their revolutionary ideas in the Ottoman realm.⁶⁰ As such, the *Potemkin* issue continued for another year for the sultan.

Meanwhile, news of disorders, strikes, uprisings, and meetings of different groups regularly appeared on the first pages of both *Türk* and *Şura-yı Ümmet* with detailed

analyses of the revolutionary situation in the Russian Empire. Such news often ended with a few sentences criticizing the tsar, his government, his refusal to acknowledge the people's will, and use of force against his own subjects. The declaration of the *Zemstvo* Congress, the full text of Sergei Trubetskoi's speech, and the tsar's responses to the declaration and to Trubetskoi were printed in *Türk*'s June–July issues.⁶¹ In June 1905, an author with the pen name Dündar started to write a series of long commentary articles in *Türk* and stressed the importance of the Russian constitutional revolution as a model for the Ottomans: 'Now, we know who awaits us and we can see where we are going! In this sense, it is important for us to know which path the Russians took.'⁶²

As the expectations of a full-scale revolution in the Russian Empire grew, so did the disappointment of some Young Turks with the Ottoman public. To illustrate, an article entitled 'An Observation on the Internal Situation of Russia' pointed out as follows:

Russia is on the eve of a revolution. Until now, the Russian government has tried to disorient European public opinion by attributing these events to economic problems . . . Strikes in St. Petersburg and Moscow, pogroms in Odessa and Warsaw, the situation of the Black Sea fleet . . . All these events show that Russia is pregnant with a revolution that will change its backward face and is [already] threatening the tsarist regime. The tsar is powerlessly looking for a solution . . . The soldiers in the Far East have now sided with the people . . . There are two groups of revolutionists in Russia now: one wants to change everything in Russia from bottom to top and the other still favours the tsar . . . Out of today's disorder and uprisings, a new Russia may emerge. Then, Russia may become a real world power which should be an example for us, the Ottomans. Even the Chinese have decided to summon a parliament within a 10-year period and in order to learn this from the Japanese they sent more than 2,000 students there. If Russia has a constitution, then there will remain no country governed by the old regime in Asia or in Europe except us. We rejected the reform proposals from Europe by pointing to Russia as an example of autocracy. Now, we will have no excuse. We have written and will continue to write about Russia as an example. It is not that we want the same bloody events to take place in our country, but we want our people to learn lessons . . . How can we remain idle while these are happening in Russia? If we do not take Russia as an example, it is very likely that we will experience the same disasters.⁶³

As early as 3 August *Türk* wrote that the tsar was now convinced that the only way to save his throne was to implement the proposed reforms. Otherwise, the Russians were determined to put a complete end to his autocracy.⁶⁴ Upheavals, strikes, and social tension in the Russian Empire culminated in the *ukaz* of 6 August, in which the tsar granted his subjects a consultative assembly and a very restricted election process. These developments, however, were considered a great victory by the Young Turks. *Türk* printed 'the news of freedom of the Russians' on its first page:

Do such great outcomes and rewards come from great struggles and difficulties?
Russia has gone through enough struggles and difficulties, both domestically

and internationally. Despite all these difficulties, the Russians are writing a glorious history: 12 August.⁶⁵ As of 12 August, the Russians have become a member of the European family. On 12 August (on the birthday of his son, Alexei), the tsar granted an assembly to the Russians. Although the decree does not grant everything that the *zemstvos* and people demanded, with new arrangements, this can slowly and gradually evolve into something similar to the system of the European governments.⁶⁶

Although *Türk* considered the *ukaz* as a critical outcome of the people's struggle thanks to the fact that the existence of a popular assembly itself would have a long-term impact on the Russian nation,⁶⁷ *Şura-yı Ümmet* did not agree that this was the ultimate triumph. However, there was hope for more substantial gains as long as the army and peasants joined the ranks of the revolutionaries:

Revolution is a sudden and violent change in a society's structure . . . Now, Russia is experiencing a revolution. The power belongs to one or a few classes in every society . . . One of the reasons for the current revolution in Russia is that several classes in Russia are trying to seize the power from an autocrat . . . Industrial workers are openly hostile to the tsar . . . and the agrarian workers have gradually withdrawn their support from the tsarist bureaucracy. Opposition among them [to the autocracy] has strengthened. Providing that the agrarian disturbances in various provinces are organized . . . and if most of the peasants join the opposition and the signs of disobedience increase in the army most of which is composed of the peasants, the current structure of the tsarist government will be no more.⁶⁸

The Young Turk journals realized that the real change and victory came with the October Manifesto issued on 30 October, promising basic freedoms and a constitutional monarchy. The journal *Türk* fashioned the text of the manifesto and a long commentary about it. The journal described it as being tantamount to a 'great revolution':

Now, all subjects of the Russian Empire were granted freedom. Namely, they demanded and obtained their freedom . . . If people cannot sacrifice themselves, they cannot reach their aims . . . The Russians risked their lives and shed their blood for freedom . . . A general amnesty was announced two days ago. Russian history has just experienced a great revolution.⁶⁹

Moreover, an article written by Konuralp in *Türk* regarded the manifesto as the beginning of a path that would take the Russians to the level of civilized and free nations of Europe. The same article also presented noteworthy comments on the future of the Romanov dynasty and how the Ottoman Empire would be affected by the 1905 Revolution:

Although the tsar was able to sign an agreement with Japan, he failed to sign an agreement with his own people. The freedom demanded and obtained by the Russians cannot be easily reversed. It is known that a constitution is not granted

but taken . . . Fearing the spread of the uprisings and disorders, the tsar had to grant a constitution and an assembly to the people . . . Journals, which were strictly censored until a few months ago, are now shaking the authorities of censorship. The government will have to satisfy the people and the tsar will see how meaningless the God-given autocratic law is. If Romanovs do not lose their throne at this time, they may understand that their Great Father [God] still favours them . . . Seeing the events in Russia, we should awaken. If one flips through the pages of history, it can be seen that such revolutions occurring in one country show their effects on the neighbouring countries. It is our country that is close to Russia and in need of freedom. Russia of the last year should be an example for us. If we do not know how a nation obtains its civil freedoms, we should learn. This chaotic situation has already begun to drag us to the edge of a chasm . . . Let's show a sign of life . . . [Our] nation should now take control of [its destiny].⁷⁰

Similarly, *Şura-yı Ümmet* stressed the significance of the manifesto and advised the Ottoman revolutionaries to learn from the Russian experience, especially in terms of methods of peaceful protest such as sending delegations to the sultan and local governors. The author then suggested that if the sultan were to reject these petitions, it was the duty of the nation to defend its rights with the force of arms.⁷¹

The journal *Türk* took these arguments to another level, claiming, 'The Russian Revolution proved to be greater than the French Revolution. From now on, the Russians will not be satisfied with a constitutional monarchy and will be the first to declare a republic among Europeans . . . They have completely realized that what they want is not a constitutional monarchy, but a republic.'⁷² Pointing out the international consequences of the 1905 Revolution and its impact on the Ottoman Empire, an article in *Türk* stated that far from being a rebellion with internal causes and manifestations, this revolution would not only affect the Russian Empire but also the area ranging from the Adriatic coast to China.⁷³

Apart from contemplating the future of the Ottomans in the wake of the 1905 Revolution, the Young Turks were particularly interested in the fate of another group of people, that is, the Turkic Muslims of the Russian Empire. As the self-declared voice of Turkish nationalism, this was one of the issues that the journal *Türk* frequently analysed in its 1905 issues. As early as March 1905, the journal stated that the Muslims should fight with the oppressed Russians against the oppressors: 'The statue of autocracy in Russia is tottering . . . The Muslims should open their eyes and not be crushed under the rubble of this statue.'⁷⁴ In his article entitled 'To the Muslims of Russia', Turgud wrote that the Muslims ought to participate in politics and establish a Muslim party to make their voice heard. He also stressed that they were to be mindful of their position in Russia and use it to their advantage so that they could obtain some level of political power.⁷⁵ Another columnist, Uğur, pointed out that the Muslims of Russia should not insist on remaining neutral during the revolution. Otherwise, he argued, they would be completely assimilated.⁷⁶

As has been shown, the Russian revolution of 1905 was considered to have paved the way for greater changes in the Russian Empire. However, in reality, the tsarist government was still too powerful. Realizing this, S. Sezai wrote an article in *Şura-yı Ümmet* and mentioned the possibility of the failure of the revolution. The author

argued that although revolutions took a long period of time to brew, a successful one should normally seize the power in an instant:

If it does not, then it means that the revolution has not been prepared adequately. The French Revolution, for example, occurred in a few days following the Bastille incident . . . There are two possible endings for revolutions staged over a long period of time. One is to succeed in an instant. The other is to perish over a long time. The reason why the Russian Revolution has not yet succeeded in reaching its ultimate goals is that the revolution has not occurred in a measured and organized way and that the scope of the revolution is not very broad. There are huge gaps among the [members of] revolutionary party in Russia in terms of their ideology and objectives.⁷⁷

While the author put forth some very interesting arguments with regard to the 1905 Revolution, he finished his article by assuring his readers that it would indeed be successful in spite of this short postponement, because the Russians paid for it with their blood and there was no power that could alter the course of a revolution.⁷⁸ The same hope was kept alive in other journals as well. Mustafa Ragıp, in another Young Turk journal, *Feryad*, wrote, ‘Now, the internal situation of Russia seems to have calmed down to some extent. However, the real revolution in Russia may begin after this.’⁷⁹ This hope was important as the success of this revolution in one of the strongholds of autocracy was a great encouragement for the Young Turks. After all, ‘those absolutists, who do not know or do not want to know how sacred the will of the people is, should learn a lesson from the Russian Revolution’.⁸⁰ Referring to the 1876 constitution, M. Ragıp stressed that nations not willing to fight for their freedom by risking their lives were bound to lose it, as the Ottomans had shown in 1877.⁸¹

In 1906, a counter-revolution was underway in the Russian Empire. The first Duma opened in April 1906 and was quickly dissolved by Nicholas II in June 1906. This was a shocking development for the Young Turks. *Şura-yı Ümmet* compared this event to the closing of the first Ottoman parliament by Abdülhamid II in February 1878 and argued that the despots were not to be trusted with their promises. Interestingly, the journal stated that now the army would determine the future of Russia, again referring to the importance placed on the army by the Young Turks and to the fact that by that time many young officers of the Ottoman army had started to join the opposition.⁸²

The Yıldız Palace was aware of the tsar’s successful counter-revolutionary policies. In addition to the articles on the 1905 Revolution translated from various European newspapers such as *Die Zeit* and *Lokal Anzeiger* and Russian ones such as *Novoe Vremia* and *Novosti*,⁸³ the Ottoman ambassador in St Petersburg submitted voluminous reports pertaining to the counter-revolution in 1906.⁸⁴ For this reason, the sultan was well-informed and might have possibly thought that had a similar revolutionary outbreak occurred in the Ottoman Empire, it could have been successfully contained. Abdülhamid II was actually effective in taking precautions to curb similar revolutionary tendencies among his subjects by drawing lessons from the revolutions in Russia and Iran. However, he probably overlooked an important institution that did not oppose Nicholas II during the 1905 Revolution, namely the army. The Russian

constitutionalists and revolutionaries were not as successful as the Young Turks in recruiting military officers to their ranks. It should be remembered that the Young Turks attained their objective of restoration of the parliament in 1908 thanks to the leadership and support of the army officers.

In conclusion, the aforementioned Young Turk journals wrote, interpreted, and analysed the 1905 Russian Revolution as it provided their readers and themselves with a very close and real case of a constitutional revolution happening in the strongest autocracy of the world. The news about it often appeared on the first pages of these journals, mainly as editorials, representing their importance. Through the prism of *Şura-yı Ümmet* and *Türk* we can see that the 1905 Russian Revolution was a defining moment for the Young Turks, who believed that a constitutional regime was the only way to save the Ottoman Empire and to deter foreign encroachment or intervention. The Young Turks conceived the 1905 Revolution as a victory against the autocratic regimes from which the Russians and Ottomans suffered alike and as a watershed in the history of the Russian nation and the world. Observing a revolution happening next door in the Russian Empire, the Young Turks not only formulated and reassessed their own methods and means of bringing a constitutional monarchy to the Ottoman Empire, but also assured themselves of the rightfulness of their cause and of its success. It can be argued that the 1905 Russian Revolution sowed in the minds of the Young Turks an understanding of revolution from below and, along with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906, it helped the Young Turks transform their initially intellectual movement into a political one that would put an end to the rule of Abdülhamid II in 1908.

Notes

1. Sultan Abdül Hamid, *Siyasi Hatıralarım* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1975), p.122.
2. 'Rusya'da Harekat-ı Fikriyye', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.68, 6 Feb. 1905.
3. In addition to the Russian and Ottoman empires, countries such as Japan (1874), Iran (1906), Mexico (1910), China (1911) experienced constitutional movements. See N. Sohrabi, 'Historicizing Revolutions: Constitutional Revolutions in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia 1905–1908', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.100 (1995), pp.1383–447; T. Skocpol, 'State and Revolution: Old Regimes and Revolutionary Crises in France, Russia, and China', *Theory and Society*, Vol.7 (1979), pp.7–95; I. Spector, *The First Russian Revolution and its Impact on Asia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962).
4. For the Young Turks and their revolutionary activities, see M.Ş. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); M.Ş. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); S. Akşin, 'Jön Türkler', *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985); Ş. Mardin, *Jön Türklerin siyasi fikirleri, 1895–1908* (Istanbul İletişim Yayınları, 1983).
5. M.Ş. Hanioglu, 'Jön Türk Basını', *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), p.845; Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, p.63.
6. *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.1, 10 April 1902; for a broader description of the journal and its publishers, see Mardin, *Jön Türklerin*, pp.250–85.
7. *Türk*, No.1, 5 Nov. 1903; Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, pp.65–73.
8. L.M.J. Garnett, *Turkish Life in Town and Country* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), p.45.
9. Kh.M. Tsovakian, 'Vlianie russkoi revoliutsii 1905 g. na revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Turtsii', *Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie*, Vol.3 (1945), pp.15–35, esp. 17–18.
10. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Elçilik, Şehbenderlik Ve Ataşemilerlik (hereafter Y.PRK.EŞA), no. 46/15. For the 1905 Russian Revolution and its course, see A. Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988);

- S. Harcave, *First Blood: The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London: The Bodley Head, 1964); H.E. Salisbury, *Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions 1905–1917* (New York: Doubleday Company, 1978); T. Shanin, *Russia, 1905–07: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1986).
11. *Türk*, No.59, 15 Dec. 1904.
 12. *Türk*, No.60, 22 Dec. 1904.
 13. The *ukaz* was issued on 25 Dec. 1904 (Gregorian).
 14. 'Rusya'da Islahat', *Türk*, No.61, 29 Dec. 1904.
 15. 'Rusya Müslümanlarına', *Türk*, No.101, 13 Oct. 1905.
 16. Ibid.
 17. *Türk*, No.61, 29 Dec. 1904.
 18. K.F. Shatsillo (ed.), *Dnevnik Imperatora Nikolaia II* (Moscow: Orbita, 1991), p.246.
 19. In fact, the number of workers – most probably due to the source that the journal used – was exaggerated here. The marchers were no more than 200,000.
 20. Father Gapon was 35 years old at that time.
 21. *Türk*, No.65, 26 Jan. 1905.
 22. Ibid.
 23. 'Rusya'da Fikir ve Asker', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.71, 21 March 1905. Indeed, the description of the Bloody Sunday is romanticized and fictionalized here.
 24. Y.PRK.EŞA., No.47/13.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Son of Mithad Pasha, who was the architect of the 1876 constitution and parliament in the Ottoman Empire.
 27. A.H. Mithat, *Hatıralarım, 1872–1946* (Istanbul: Mithat Akçit Yayınları, 1946), pp.80–82.
 28. *İctihad*, Feb. 1905.
 29. Ibid.
 30. *Türk*, No.87, 6 July 1905; 'Muharebe ve İhtilâl', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.72, 6 April 1905.
 31. 'Rusya'da Fikir ve Asker', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, no.71, 21 March 1905.
 32. *Türk*, No.65, 26 Jan. 1905.
 33. 'Rusya'ya Dair', *Türk*, No.67, 9 Feb. 1905.
 34. *Türk*, No.68, 16 Feb. 1905.
 35. 'Rusya'da Harekât-ı Fikriyye', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.68, 6 Feb. 1905.
 36. *Türk*, No.68, 16 Feb. 1905.
 37. Turgud, 'Rusya Ahvali', *Türk*, No.71, 9 March 1905.
 38. 'Rusya'da Fikir ve Asker', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.71, 21 March 1905.
 39. Ibid.
 40. 'Muharebe ve İhtilâl', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.72, 6 April 1905.
 41. 'Maksim Gorki'nin Mektubu', *Türk*, No.91, 3 Aug. 1905.
 42. *İctihad*, May 1905.
 43. Konuralp, 'Rusya'nın Ahval-i Hazırası ve Bizler', *Türk*, No.106, 16 Nov. 1905.
 44. 'Muharebe ve İhtilâl', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.72, 6 April 1905.
 45. S. Sezai, 'Rusya'da İhtilâl Hala Niçün Muvaffak Olamadı?', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.87, 9 Feb. 1906.
 46. 'Maksim Gorki'nin Mektubu', *Türk*, No.68, 16 Feb. 1905.
 47. 'Muharebe ve İhtilâl', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.72, 6 April 1905.
 48. *Türk*, No.74, 2 April 1905.
 49. *Türk*, No.75, 13 April 1905.
 50. *Türk*, No.78, 4 May 1905.
 51. *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.75, 20 May 1905.
 52. Y.PRK.EŞA.47/47.
 53. Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan Abdülhamid, Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1990), pp. 237–8.
 54. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Askerî Maruzat (hereafter Y.PRK.ASK.), Nos.227/95, 231/13; BOA, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri Yıldız Perakende Mabeyn Başkitabeti (hereafter Y.PRK.BŞK.), Nos.79/91, 74/76.
 55. Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan Abdülhamid*, pp.237–9.
 56. 'Knyaz Potemkin Zırhlısı', *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.80, 16 Aug. 1905.

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Y.PRK.EŞA 47/91.
60. Y.PRK.ASK. 232/20.
61. ‘Zemstvolarin Çar’a Hitabı’, *Türk*, No.85, 22 June 1905; ‘Çar’ın Cevabı’, *Türk*, No.87, 6 July 1905.
62. Dündar, ‘Rusya Hakkında Bir Mütalaa’, *Türk*, No.86, 29 June 1905.
63. ‘Rusya’nın Ahvâl-i Dahilisine Bir Nazar’, *Türk*, No.89, 20 July 1905.
64. Dündar, ‘Rusya Hakkında Bir Mütalaa’, *Türk*, No.91, 3 Aug. 1905.
65. The *ukaz* was issued on 19 Aug. (Gregorian). As this issue of the journal was published on 17 Aug., it probably refers to the outcome of the conference held at Peterhof on 1–8 Aug. 1905 to debate the Bulygin Plan to establish a consultative popular assembly. The conference was presided over by Tsar Nicholas II who eventually sided with Bulygin and his plan.
66. Özbek, ‘Siyasi’, *Türk*, No.93, 17 Aug. 1905.
67. *Türk*, No.99, 28 Sept. 1905.
68. ‘Rusya İhtilâline Dair’, *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.82, 14 Sept. 1905.
69. Uğur, ‘Gördüm ki’, *Türk*, No.105, 9 Nov. 1905.
70. Konuralp, ‘Rusya’nın Ahvâl-i Hazırası ve Bizler’, *Türk*, No.106, 16 Nov. 1905.
71. *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.86, 13 Nov. 1905.
72. ‘Rusya İhtilâl-i Kebiri’, *Türk*, No.107, 23 Nov. 1905.
73. *Türk*, No.112, 28 Dec. 1905.
74. Turgud, ‘Rusya Ahvali’, *Türk*, No.71, 9 March 1905.
75. Turgud, ‘Rusya Müslümanlarına’, *Türk*, No.101, 13 Oct. 1905.
76. Uğur, ‘Gödüm ki’, *Türk*, No.105, 9 Nov. 1905.
77. ‘S. Sezai, ‘Rusya’da İhtilâl Hala Niçün Muvaffak Olamadı?’ *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.87, 9 Feb. 1906.
78. Ibid.
79. M. Ragıp, ‘Rusya’da Meclis-i Meşveret’, *Feryad*, No.64, 31 May 1906.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. ‘Çar ve Duma’, *Şura-yı Ümmet*, No.96, 1 Aug. 1906.
83. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tahrirat-ı Ecnebiye Ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği (hereafter Y.PRK.TKM.) nos. 48/66, 48/67, 49/17, 49/25, 50/15, 50/14, 494/495; Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri Yıldız Sadaret Hususî Maruzat Evrakı (hereafter Y.A.HUS.) Nos.497/98, 500/103, 500/113, 499/16, 507/3, 500/142, 501/39, 501/120, 502/24, 502/29, 502/79, 502/137, 503/23, 503/24, 504/97, 504/129, 506/7, 506/25, 506/117, 506/141, 507/ 507/177, 495/66.
84. Y.PRK.EŞA, Nos.48/47, 49/54, 49/63, 49/89, 50/20, 50/50, 51/9, 51/33, 51/71, 51/28, 51/71, 51/94, 52/28.