

A Crime of Silence

The Armenian Genocide

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal

Preface by Pierre Vidal-Naquet



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2: The Ideology of the Young Turk Movement

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My name is Gerard J. Libaridian. I am a historian with particular interest in the history of the Armenian people during the last century. I have completed my graduate studies in this field at the University of California at Los Angeles. I have authored articles and essays on the Armenian national liberation struggle, the genocide and its historiography, and Soviet Armenia and the contemporary dispersion.

I am currently the editor of the quarterly English language scholarly journal *Armenian Review* (published since 1948 in Boston) and the director of the recently founded Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During the last two and one half years I have also been directing the task of cataloguing and microfilming the central archives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Dashnaktsutiun.

The ideology of the Young Turks, more specifically the *Ittihad ve Terakke* (Union and Progress) Party, has presented a special interest to me for many years. One obvious reason is that the leaders bear primary and ultimate responsibility for the planning and execution of the tragedy that befell the Armenians during the First World War and, as such, it is useful to understand the concerns, principles, and values which motivated them. Their ideology becomes all the more interesting, when one looks at the repetition of the crime of genocide in this century and its increasing practice as an accepted — if not altogether condoned — tool used by governments to resolve conflicts. The larger context within which this first genocide of the century occurred presents a further challenge. This was the period when Western states, far along the path of modernization and organization as nation-states, presented serious challenges to what is termed today the third world, creating new conflicts and giving new articulation to old ones.

One of the major changes affecting political and social relations was the structure of states. The legitimization of power on the basis of ethnic, cultural, and religious identity of the population acquired a dynamic

significance for old empires and new states. For the Young Turks, who engineered and supervised over the transitional stage, the creation of a new Turkish nation-state out of the old Ottoman Empire passed through the path of the homogenization of the population.

The Ottoman Empire in the 19th century had the dubious distinction of being at once oppressed by many, often conflicting, Western imperialisms and oppressor of its subject peoples which included non-Turk Arabs and Kurds and non-Muslim Armenians and Greeks. The two phenomena were further related. Elements in the Ottoman Empire opposing the sultan's regime borrowed their models of reform and revolution from the West; Western governments, meanwhile, often couched their aggressive policies toward Turkey under the cloak of humanitarian help to subject Ottoman peoples. The problem of withstanding Western technological and military challenge was thus intricately tied to the demand for reforms from within. In other words, the survival of the state could not be guaranteed without some fundamental change in its character and/or a redefinition of the role — symbolic and real — of the Turkish element within government.

Ottoman and Turkish reformers faced this dilemma throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Reforms satisfactory to all ethnic and religious elements — reforms ostensibly supported by the Western Powers — had to be based on the principle of equality which threatened the principle of dominance of Turks; reforms essential for the survival of a budding middle and industrial class and specially a disintegrating peasantry would have undermined an oligarchy which changed some of its colour but which excluded, characteristically, the masses of the Turkish and non-Turkish population from participating in the definition of the interests of the state or the nation.

This dilemma explains also a fundamental characteristic of reform in the context of Ottoman and Turkish society: it was always ordained from above. Yet the ultimate but consistent rejection of reforms — political, social, and economic — by successive Turkish oligarchies was rationalized by the need to resist foreign intervention. Often articulated in legal terms, the constant state of national emergency has become an integral part of the political process in Turkey since Ottoman times. The imposition of military or quasi-military rule under a variety of names has been facilitated by equating internal dissent, meaning demands for reform, with the interests of those who threaten the welfare of the fatherland. The crude equalization between the interests of a ruling oligarchy — along with its exclusive vision of society and its abstracted concept of power — and the survival of the state has eventually developed into a pattern. Turkish oligarchies — Ottoman Young Turk or modern Turkish — have contributed to a false consciousness among the Turkish people that sharing the ethnic identity of the ruler is tantamount to sharing in power. Once the pattern of such an equation has evolved, it is not too difficult to suspect that in some cases foreign

threats and crises were manufactured to facilitate the suppression of reform movements.

Whatever the variations on the theme, oligarchies need legitimation that will account for the relations of actual power and articulate its principles through a terminology that sanctions the ruler's concerns. Each generation, consequently, found a new ideology to articulate its hopes and fears as well as to repress them. Each generation responded in its own way to the challenge of preserving the state while accommodating change. The questions have always been whether change accommodates more than an oligarchy, and if so, at what cost.

For the reforming sultans of the 1830s and 1850s the West was not as yet the multifaceted challenge it was soon to become. Theirs was the sort of vision characteristic of benevolent yet secure rulers. Even the Young Ottoman generation of the 1870s took for granted the imperial character of the state; it continued to assume the coexistence of a variety of peoples under the predominance of the Turkish ethnic group. The Young Ottomans were ostracized and exiled by Sultan Abdul-Hamid II and had no real opportunity to test their principles. They also represented the last opportunity to develop a political framework capable of accommodating a variety of real human — individual and collective — needs. For that sultan, as for many a subsequent Turkish government, serious reforms meant modernization of the military and related branches of the government — reforms which ensured efficiency and centralization.

In essence, the Young Turks inherited and led to its logical conclusion this endemic vision of change and survival. Their brief tenure of office (1908-1918) and the wars which characterized that tenure accentuated the characteristic dilemma of oligarchies in Turkey: the inability to reform by sharing power, while reform appears to be necessary for survival. The Young Turks accentuated those policies of the Ottoman government which obviated the need for reforms by silencing the call for change.

As a transitional government, the Young Turks began their career by sharing values with the Young Ottomans: willingness to liberalize the regime and accommodate non-Turkish, and initially non-Muslim elements. Increasingly, however, they felt more comfortable with and shared Sultan Abdul-Hamid II's Pan-Islamic/Pan-Turkic formula to supplant the earlier Western and internal support for their liberal reformist programme — a programme supported, among others, by Armenians. By 1919, they fully appreciated the vision which Mustafa Kemal was articulating for his people: a Turkish nation-state, where everyone was some type of a Turk by definition just because he/she lived within boundaries now recognized as Turkey. In fact, it was their extermination of Armenians that made it possible for Mustafa Kemal to articulate fully such a vision of a modern Turkey.

This eclecticism explains the seemingly paradoxical charge levelled against the Young Turks, that of not having an ideology. Caught between what was and what was to be, the Young Turks were overly sensitive to the need to ensure a sense of the empire under an oligarchy that could both *preserve* the legitimacy which historical continuity provided and *resolve* rationally the challenge which a more fragmented world presented to them. They could thus identify with the social and political conservatism of the sultan they deposed in 1909 and with the secularizing programme of Mustafa Kemal that was to come. Thus, despite the political and historiographic controversies between the Young Turks and the sultan or the Young Turks and the Kemalists, there is a community of interests reflected in recent political positions and controversies appreciated by statist Turkish scholars.

The Young Turk vision which evolved between their assumption of power in 1908 and the execution of the plan of extermination of Armenians revolved around a flexible formula: at a minimum, it would guarantee a turkified core for a nation-state; at the most, it would result in a Pan-Turanic or Pan-Turkic Empire which would be a worthy inheritor of the Ottoman Empire, albeit erected on a different principle of legitimation. The minimum programme would accommodate defeat in the war; the maximum programme looked forward to victory. The exclusive nationalism underlying the first and the racism extolled in the second were the two sides of the same coin. In both cases, there was no room for the Armenians, those constant reminders of the need for reform, who, as surrogate Westerners, were targets more easily destroyed.

For Young Turks, ideology was as expendable as were the Armenian people, when faced with the more immediate need to survive in power. An integral component of that outlook was the survival with some claim to having played a crucial function in the realization of a manifest destiny.

By 1914 the Young Turks had a fully articulated ideology to the extent that exclusivism and abstraction of the state could be considered such. They also put to practice that ideology by gradually eliminating from government all those who might disagree with them.

Both in the capital and in the provinces the *Ittihad ve Terakke* took control of the administration. They created a mechanism by which policies could be made and implemented without the few individuals responsible for the policies being held responsible for their actions. Momentous decisions could thus be taken, often with tragic consequences for the state and its subjects, without the chain of command or process of decision-making being altogether clear or accountable. The decision for the Ottoman Empire to enter the war, and this on the side of Germany, the disastrous Caucasian campaign by Enver, and the extermination of Armenians could be accomplished with impunity. The triumvirate of Talaat, Enver and Jemal could get away with it

because, on the one hand, they encouraged an atmosphere within which political discourse was limited to the terms 'patriotism' and 'duty'. They, of course, reserved the exclusive right to define what each of those terms meant, what they required. The doctrine of responsibility of the state toward its subjects was replaced by the demand for total obedience in the name of the fatherland, a virtue extolled by the likes of Ziya Gökalp. In addition, the intellectuals in the party were able to adopt a sort of social Darwinism which, while claiming to participate in the modern, progressive world, allowed them to feel comfortable with their racism and state-sponsored violence.

Parallel to the manipulation of the ideological sphere, the *Ittihad ve Terakke* developed an effective way of government while avoiding the responsibility of governing. It created a dual structure of government: the official administrative structure and the *Ittihad ve Terakke* operations at critical junctures of that administration. There were in place during World War I two chains of command, the second being the more critical and being subject to the *Cemiyet*, or party leadership; even then the *Ittihad ve Terakke* refused to function as a political party. It remained a secret society, whose deliberations were not subject to public scrutiny. Thus, in its 1910 and 1911 secret congresses in Salonika, the *Ittihad ve Terakke* resolved to implement the turkification of Anatolia, leaving the use of military means for the appropriate moment. This it did while pursuing a public policy of cooperation with Armenians.

It was possible then, both ideologically and politically, to undertake a policy of homogenization of the population in 1914-15. The two principles underlying this process corresponded to the two major factors determining Ottoman-Turkish history: Western imperialism which dismembered the outlying, largely non-Turkish provinces, and turkification of non-Turkish elements within core provinces. The first decreased the number of non-Turks by secession, the second by extermination.

The accomplishment of what the *Ittihad ve Terakke* considered its manifest destiny in Turkish history, the reaction of a turkified Anatolia, has had a curious evaluation by those they deposed, the conservative Ottomans, and those who deposed them, the Kemalists. It is obvious that as a solution to the Armenian problem, it seems to have been successful. As such it has been appreciated, implicitly and explicitly, by all who considered Turkish supremacy — whether within an empire or nation-state — the ultimate principle to uphold. Yet the ideology of secularization seems to have led Kemal Atatürk to criticize the massacres and deportations of Armenians at least on one occasion: in an interview with a Swiss newspaper in 1926 reproduced in the *Los Angeles Herald*. The criticism was on the basis that such an action showed discrimination on the basis of religious difference, something that the new nation-state should not tolerate.

From an ideological point of view more important seems to be the

trial of the Ittihadists by the Turkish government in 1919 in Istanbul. These trials occurred from April to July 1919. The government, at the time under the tutelage of the British, collected evidence of the deportation and massacres and, in a military court, tried the responsible officials, the most important ones in absentia. The trials ended with the conviction of most of the accused including Talaat, Enver and Jemal.

The transcripts of these trials have been preserved though, unfortunately, they have as yet to be translated from the Ottoman Turkish. These are known as the *Takvim-i Vekai*.

I would like to submit here copies of the texts of the transcripts of three sessions for which there have been translations.

I will end my presentation by reading segments translated into English, segments which confirm the ideology of the Ittihadists discussed earlier. In addition, three specific documents entered as evidence during those trials will also be introduced.

The first document is dated 27 April 1919. This document is found in the official journal of the empire, the *Takvim-i Vekay*, which reproduced a transcription of courts-martial of the Ottoman officials under the title *divan il-harbi urfi* [special courts martial]; it is part of the records of the first session. A copy of the collection of the journal is extant at the Library of Congress in the US; others may be found in Turkey. I am introducing here the section which deals with the identification of the accused. To communicate to you an impression of the proceedings, here is an excerpt:

President — Hon. Pasha, the name of your Highness?

Said Halim Pasha — Mehmed Said Halim.

President — Father of your Highness?

Said Halim Pasha — Halim.

President — Age of your Highness?

Said Halim Pasha — Fifty-six.

President — Where were you born?

Said Halim Pasha — In Cairo.

President — Your residence?

Said Halim Pasha — Yeni Keuy.

President — The degree of your education?

Said Halim Pasha — High.

The second document, also from the *Takvim-i Vekay*, is from issue Number 3571 and deals with the first session. I would like to introduce the Ottoman text and two translations of the transcription of the special session when the verdict was read. I will read some preliminary

paragraphs and then the verdict itself. The first part was translated to English by friends, the latter part by the British Foreign Office at the time. The documents are from the British Foreign Office archives:

The criminal committee, the so-called Union and Progress, had represented itself as a political party, and under this guise, had published its by-laws; however, beyond the political organization, it evidently had other secret organizations and institutions. The leaders did not refrain, in practice, from working in that manner.

Dr. Nazim Bey, Atif Bey, Dr. Behaeddin Shakir Bey and some of the other most influential members had organized the *Teshkilati Mahsusa*, a commission which included also Kemal Bey, a member of the Central Committee, who had organized the Commission of Supply (*Iase Komisionu*) with his colleagues.

It is superfluous to reiterate what has repeatedly been said in the indictment about the activities and affairs placed in practice by the above-mentioned commissions of the party.

As is evident from the details of its correspondence, the party of Union and Progress had evolved and approved secret plans and special goals and had recourse to the imposition of tyrannical measures of every kind in order to have its programmes accepted without exception. The party even applied capital punishment in the case of Halil Bey, of Galata and others. . . .

Under the pretext of carrying out the Law of Deportation, it organized all kinds of crimes that were uniformly perpetrated throughout most of the Ottoman territory. During these events, the deportation areas were under the jurisdiction (or supervision) of the representatives and responsible secretaries of the Union and Progress Party.

The chief leaders of the Union and Progress Party organized the *Teshkilati Mahsusa* commission in the above-mentioned areas. They confessed that they had accepted the chairmanship and active leadership of the *Teshkilati Mahsusa*. It is established, and evident that Dr. Behaeddin Shakir Bey, who supervised them (the gang leaders), organized the responsible delegates and inspectors of the Union and Progress Party with the same purpose.

It is evident that the Committee pre-planned and organized all the crimes which were committed.

So, the Committee ruled against Ottoman subjects — individuals, communities and peoples, without exception, in order to attain its goals, and it took all measures necessary to remove, permanently, all resistance from within the ranks of government officials.

In a series of events in our country beginning in 1908, and particularly during the Balkan War of 1912, the Committee revealed irrational aspirations, and entrusted the War Office to Enver Bey, who is now a fugitive, in order to carry out the decisions and realize the goals of the Committee. Enver had twice urged Ahmet Izzet Pasha, former Prime

Minister (and Enver's predecessor as Minister of War), to resign from the War Office. On those occasions, they had terrorized Izzet Pasha.

During the deportations, they issued orders to the Governors of provinces to commit crimes. When some members of the government in the provinces refused to serve their criminal purposes, they had them dismissed immediately, particularly Jemal Bey, Mutesarif of Yozgat; Reshid Pasha, Governor-General of Kastamuni; and Mazhar Bey, Governor-General of Ankara.

In his answers to the questions, Tahsin Bey, Governor-General of Erzerum, made detailed statements which established the above facts.

The Committee took in hand the direction of the government of the provinces by means of similar measures and threats and imposed its will on all of them. The Committee not only intervened in the affairs of the government, but also gave its most influential members offices in the Council of Ministers and accepted the presence of those ministers in the General Assembly (of the party). Without any legal authority or jurisdiction, they held meetings and councils, and made decisions concerning the affairs of state.

Since its advent, the Committee injected a coldness into the relations between the various elements of the population living in the country by using many unprecedented measures and threats. The Committee organized and enforced boycotts and deportations of Moslem and non-Moslem elements in the Anatolian provinces, where they lived together.

The above explanations provide evidence that the Committee certainly took the most extreme measures in order to realize its special programmes and was successful in usurping the power of the government.

Here is the part translated by the British Foreign Office, a portion of the verdict of the court martial:

As the Minister of Finance Djavid Bey said openly in his statements reported in the minutes of the 5th section of the *Chambre des Députés* on the 24th and 26th October 1334 [i.e. 1918], this group of action of Union & Progress has shown in its decisions concerning the destiny of the nation and of the country, an audacity and an over-confidence such that they did not think it fit to submit to the ministers' Council the decision concerning the declaration of war, whilst even sovereigns do not take such decisions of their own initiative. Everybody having understood that this way of acting could not give good results, the acts of the committee that the opposition itself had respected seemed blameworthy to level-headed people.

On the other hand, the fact that the state of siege which had been abolished necessarily at the time of the change of regime has been maintained almost without interruption, that the Sublime Porte has been

attacked by a clique led by the senior members of the Committee of Union & Progress, that the War Minister Nazim Pacha and his aide de camp were killed and that a Cabinet Union & Progress was formed after that the Cabinet of Kiamil Pacha was overthrown; that at the time of the 2 cabinets which followed, the able and honest and experienced civil servants were dismissed and replaced by persons affiliated to the Committee has had for result: to give rise to justified general complaints against the arbitrary and tyrannical administration, to the point of making people regret the despotic regime, to dissatisfy more particularly the non-Moslem populations and above all to bring the Armenians (who realised that their belief that freedom would insure security and justice was not founded) to seek a favourable opportunity for the realisation of their national aims, which they envisaged before.

Questions of nationalities created between the different nationalities and even the Moslems have provoked cool feelings and divisions, interfering in so doing with Ottoman unity . . .

Considering that these facts have been established by investigations and enquiries and by the above-named bills of indictment; that there is no possibility to refute the five points set out and examined by our Court Martial or to maintain that they do not exist, we have acquired the conviction in our conscience that the personal crimes above mentioned assigned to the Committee of Union & Progress have been committed in such a way as to cast a slur on its name . . .

Consequently it has been decided after deliberation, that in the light of the phases of this trial, the above-mentioned assertions of the Counsel have no value for the defence.

The five points mentioned above are as follows:-

1. The crime of the massacre of Trebizonde, of Yozgad and of Boghazlyan which, it was established during the trials which took place at the Court Martial, was organised and executed by some chiefs of Union & Progress.

In admitting even, as it was alleged during the defence, that there are among these some who came to know of these crimes only after their perpetration, they have not prevented their recurring, no more than they have done anything to punish those who committed them.

2. According to the declarations he made to the *Chambre des Députés* and which are recorded in the minutes. Saïd Halim Pacha, Grand Vizir & President of the Committee Union & Progress, had at the beginning of the mobilization invited to his house the members of the Central Committee and had explained to them, giving useful arguments, that the participation of the country to the war would be very dangerous, and that neutrality would constitute the best attitude to assume in the conflict, but that he had failed to make them adopt his opinion and consequently the State had entered the war.

Moreover, Riza Bey, one of the responsible delegates of the Union & Progress, has admitted during his trial, that without waiting for the declaration of war, he began the hostilities by means of persons belonging to organized bands at Trébizonde, whom he sent into the interior of Russia.

Finally, Djavid Bey, then Finance Minister, Tchuruk-Soulou Mahmoud Pacha, Minister of Public Works, Oscan Effendi, Post & Telegraph Minister, and Suleiman Elbostani Effendi, Trade Minister, gave their resignation, for the reason that the war had been declared without the previous decision of the Council of Ministers. These facts establish that the war had not been declared by decision of the Ministers responsible, but deliberately by the Union & Progress who wanted it so.

3. As it appears from the declarations of H. Highness Ahmed Izzet Pacha, former Grand Vizir, his resignation from the War Ministry was provoked by the interference of the Party in the Government's affairs.
4. As it results from the report read in 1332 (1916) amidst the Congress of Union & Progress and unanimously approved by its members, and from the information that the Préfecture of the town has supplied in answer to the communications sent by this Tribunal, Kemal Bey, Delegate from Constantinople, who had been put in charge by the Central Bureau of the Union & Progress of the provisioning, and whose nomination was ratified later on by the General Council of the Union, has first instituted a Council of Trade and after several societies & associations which have monopolized commercial transactions and have by these means seized the whole fortune of the population. The public wealth being concentrated so exclusively in the hands of a limited number of persons and the above-mentioned societies, the result was that, owing to an inadequate nutrition, many Ottomans were crippled, or died, and that the forces at the disposal of the State for its defence have been reduced.

The reading of the same documents has established also that the Union & Progress has provoked at the same time the meddling of its Constantinople Bureau in the functions of the Government.

5. The fact that the former Sheikhul Islam Moussa Kiazim Effendi, answering an interpellation at the Senate re. the transfer of the tribunal from the Chéri to the Ministry of Justice said: 'Do not ask for my opinion, it is the Party which demands this transfer. It must be done so', and that he confirmed these declarations during the trial, constitute an obvious proof of the interference of the Party in the State's affairs . . .

The Court Martial, taking into consideration the above-named crimes declares, unanimously, the culpability as principal factors of these crimes of the fugitives Talaat Pacha, former Grand Vizir, Enver Effendi, former War Minister, struck off the register of the Imperial

Army, Djémal Effendi, former Navy Minister, struck off too from the Imperial Army, and Dr. Nazim Effendi, former Minister of Education, members of the General Council of the Union & Progress, representing the moral person of this party; as well as for that of the fugitives Djavid Bey, former Finance Minister, and Moutapha Chéref Bey, former Trade & Agriculture Minister, members of the said council known as having participated in the crimes in question; for the culpability . . .

Then the Court Martial deliberated on the sentences.

The acts of Talaat, Enver, Djémal and Dr. Nazim falling under Article 45 of the Civil & Penal Code, 1st paragraph, those of Djavid, Moustapha Chéref and Moussa Kiazim of the same Article, paragraph 2, and Article 35 last paragraph, and these articles saying that 'are called co-authors and punished as the principal author, the individuals who commit collectively a crime or each individual, being part of a certain number of persons, who in the case of a crime consisting of several offences commits one or several of the latter with a view to accomplishing the offence. Is put to death the person who is convicted of having by force modified or suppressed the constitutional Charter, the form of the Government or rule of the heredity of the Imperial Throne. The accomplices of the execution of a crime are in the case of absence of a special disposition of the law, condemned to the following condemnations: the accomplices will be condemned to hard labour for at least 10 years if the main offence is punishable by death or by hard labour for life', the Court Martial pronounces, in accordance with the said stipulations of the Law the death penalty against Talaat, Enver, Djémal and Dr. Nazim . . .

The document that follows is also from the *Takvim-i Vekay*, Number 3571; it concerns the trial of the secretaries of the Special Organization, who, as representatives of the government, realized and supervised the execution by others of the orders from Constantinople.

But I would like to conclude by submitting three documents which were introduced during the trial itself. The first was translated to modern Turkish and then to English. It is the imperial edict of 14/27 May 1915 and concerns the Law of Deportations published in the *Takvim-i Vekay* of 19 May/1 June 1915, numbered 2189. This is, in my opinion, the law which was referred to earlier as the basis of the execution of the genocide:

Draft of law regarding the measures to be taken by the military regard of those who, during wartime, disobey the the orders of the Government.

Article 1

During wartime, the commanders of army corps, armies, and divisions,

and their deputies, and the commanders in independent zones are authorized and obligated to punish, immediately and severely, by force of arms, all those who, in any way, offer opposition to the orders of the Government and the measures taken for national defence and maintenance of law and order, or, by using arms, commit attacks or offer resistance.

Article 2

The commanders of Army corps, armies and divisions can transport the population of villages and towns to other places and settle them, individually and collectively, in accordance with the military demands if they observe any spying or treasonous behaviour.

Article 3

This law is effective at the date of its publication.

Article 4

The Acting Commander-in-Chief and War Minister is charged with the execution of this law.

The second document is the coded telegram sent by Dr. Behaeddine Shakir, president of the Special Organization, the *Teshkilati Mahsusa*, to the governor-general Sabit Bey of Mamuret-ul-Aziz or Kharput. The telegraph is dated 21 April 1915. Here is the translation:

Ministry of Internal Affairs Superintendent of the Imperial Possessions No. 33. Director of Office, date of dispatch: April 21 (1915), hour: 3, minute 43. Director of Information: Mehmed Fakhri, Place of dispatch: Erzerum. No. 2597, number of words: 20, charge: 36.

To His Excellency Sabit Bey, Governor-General of El-Aziz. No. 5, to be delivered to Nazim Bey.

Are the Armenians deported from there wiped out? Inform me of their massacre and extermination. Are the dangerous persons massacred or only expelled from the town and deported? Let me know it clearly, my brother.

April 21, 1915.

April 21, 1915 at Erzerum.

The President of the Special Organization: Behaeddin Shakir.

The last document is the certified copy of the orders given to governors-general under the jurisdiction of Mahmoud Kiamil Pasha, dated 10 July 1915. This is the translation of the decoded text:

Sublime Porte
Department of Internal Affairs
Directorate of Public Security

Copy of decoded telegram

We have learned that some Moslems are protecting Armenians in areas where the people are being exiled to the interior.

Being against the decision of the Government, the Moslem homeowners, who dare provide protection for them in their houses must be hanged in front of their homes and it will be necessary to burn the houses.

Communicate this order in a suitable manner and bring it to the attention of whomever it may concern, taking care that not a single Armenian be saved from exile.

Those Armenians who changed religion, will be exiled also.

Those who try to protect them, if in military service, will be stripped of their rank, brought to court immediately, and the commanders are to be informed; if they are civil officials, they must be immediately dismissed from office and tried by a court martial.

July 10, 1915.

The Commander of the Third Army: Mahmoud Kiamil.

To be written secretly as usual, but exceptionally.

12 current [July 12, 1915]

Written.

12 current [July 12, 1915]

Certified copy conforms to the original.

February 23, 1919.

(SEAL)

Special Office of the Superintendent of Public Security.

Discussion

Mr RIGAUX asked if it is possible to compare pan-Germanism and pan-Turkism and if there was a German influence on the ideology of the Union and Progress party. He observes that the Armenian Question was not at the centre of the trial against that party.

Mr LIBARIDIAN answered that if it was possible to discern two tendencies among the Young Turks, one favourable to cooperation with the British and the other pro-German, the second certainly became the more important, if for no other reason than the alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Germany. Also, the German army sent advisers to many parts of the Empire and some seemed to be embarrassed by the activities against the Armenians but others certainly collaborated. In any case, there was a convergence of ideologies within the hierarchical German and Turkish societies.

It is correct that the Young Turks were not tried solely for the Genocide. The objective of the court-martial was to show that their politics constituted a perversion of the traditional policies of the Sublime Porte. The new government sought to establish better relations with the Western powers. The court-martial did want to accumulate as many proofs as possible against the Young Turks and the Armenian Patriarch on his part assembled a large number of documents. But these documents have not all been exploited and have not become public.

Mr ROY asked what the social and political context was for the development of the Young Turk movement. Were its members representative of the bourgeoisie or did they belong to the traditional oligarchy?

Mr LIBARIDIAN answered that the Young Turks were not part of the traditional Ottoman elite which controlled the administration. They were largely intellectuals and members of the liberal professions who pushed an abstract ideology of the state to the extreme. They pretended to represent a nascent bourgeoisie and in fact there were Turkish

merchants now supplanting Armenians, Greeks and Jews in commerce. But these sectors lacked real popular bases. It was rather the pressure from the European challenge that as a reaction produced this party and which led to the preeminence of the most radical and totalitarian elements within it. One should not forget, on the other hand, that traditional structures of the Empire allowed discrimination against non-Turks and that for a long time wars and massacres were part of the Ottoman policy.

Mr FALK asked if nationalist ideology was directed exclusively against Armenians. What were the attitudes of Young Turks regarding Kurds, for example, during the process? Were Young Turks charged with crimes other than those committed against Armenians?

Mr LIBARIDIAN answered that the attitude of the Young Turks was the same regarding all non-Turkish populations. With regard to the Kurds, the question is more complicated. From the beginning of the 19th century, the government led a very obvious anti-Kurdish policy but toward the end of the century the Kurds were used to dislocate Armenians in Anatolia. It is important to note that the Arabs too often rebelled against the Ottomans but they were not subjected to genocide. The reason was very simple. Armenians lived in Anatolia and Ottoman politics was aimed at the total turkification of this region. Finally, during the trial they spoke largely of Armenians since they alone were the ultimate subject of the deportations.

Mr PETRAS asked what became of the Armenian properties that were expropriated. Were they distributed among others?

Mr LIBARIDIAN answered that there was no real distribution. It was largely the state that profited from it.

Mr EDELSTAM asked if Armenians were gratified that the Tribunal was holding this session.

Mr LIBARIDIAN answered positively. In the eyes of the Armenians, it is very important that a non-Armenian organization recognize that they have been the victims of a genocide.

Mr ROY stated that it is important to determine the extent of popular participation in the Genocide. In fact, if the Turkish government recognized the Genocide, might it be in fact tempted to dilute the responsibility of those governing by incriminating the ostensibly uncontrolled popular reactions.

Mr HOVANNISIAN observed that the popular participation does not

reduce in any way the responsibility of the government since it was easy for the rulers to provoke and manipulate the population.

Mr WALD stated that orders were given according to which Armenians were to be exiled or converted to Islam. Was this simply a euphemism?

Mr LIBARIDIAN indicated that at the beginning the Armenian Catholics and Armenian Protestants were to be spared, certainly not to provoke Great Britain and France. But later they were massacred as well; so were those converted to Islam, since the authorities feared that an Armenian community might survive as an Islamic community. If children were killed, the purpose was to prevent any memory of the Genocide by future generations. Certainly, not all Turks in power shared the zeal for extermination equally and that is how some Armenians were able to survive.

The trial did not produce much. Under Kemalist pressure and also that of public opinion, the court martials were dissolved and only one secondary functionary was executed. Some were imprisoned but not even for long.

Mr WALD asked what was the reaction of foreign countries after the dissolution of the court martial and Mr RIGAUX wanted to know if there were foreign countries that sustained the Turkish action against the Armenians.

In response to Mr Wald, Mr LIBARIDIAN stated that the European powers following the war wished to maintain friendly relations with the new Turkish government. He reminded Mr. Rigaux that during the massacres there was a world war. If some German officers protested, for the most part they refrained from intervening since Turkey was a precious ally.