

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CURRENT TURKISH TYPE

BEĞLÂN B. TOĞROL

Istanbul University, Turkey.

Abstract

This paper will deal with the analysis of some of the modern Turkish types that have emerged as a consequence of all the previous reforms along with the intense combined influence of literacy and secular education. The dynamism of internal and external migrations and the great significance of the recent change in Turkey from being mainly an exporter of agricultural products to being mainly an exporter of industrial products is emphasized. The contribution of the absence of class feeling and discrimination, and sense of freedom and equality inherent in the Turkish character to achievement of westernization are discussed.

The Emergence of the Current Turkish Type

Where have the Turks come to in their long saga ?

In 1950 the Democrat Party won the elections by a landslide. It is one of the most important events in recent Turkish history since the reforms of Atatürk. The Turkish people simply by casting their votes, through their own choice, elected *democracy* as a system of government for them.

The general westward drive of the Turkish people started over a millenium ago. From the eighteenth century onward this tendency had attained a definite purpose by aiming to raise the Turkish people

up to the scientific and technological level of the West. This movement was greatly stimulated by Atatürk's reforms; finally in 1950, through the popular vote, it reached its culminating point.

This event in itself is unique. For Turkey is more or less the only country in this region that has succeeded in achieving this revolution without resorting to a totalitarian régime. The achievement of Turkey is a consequence of its history, for the psycho-social forces which are effective in a process are themselves historically conditioned.

There are certain factors that have prepared the way for the success of democracy in Turkey: The first is the immense mobility of the Turkish people and their fearlessness of distances that has endured as one of the principal Turkish characteristics of over a thousand years. This characteristic in its turn, inevitably brings about in such people an openness to change and to freedom.

The second is the strong sense of equality among the Turkish people which is revealed in the absence of class feeling in Turkey. Atatürk described the Turkish people as «a fused mass, without privileges or class», and it has more or less been true throughout the Turkish history. I quote from G. Lewis (1974) :

It is worth remembering that Turkey has no tradition of class prejudice. After all, many of the great men of the Ottoman Empire in the days of its glory were slaves. The first Grand-Vizier of the Köprülü family started life as a scullion. An earlier Grand Vizier, İbrahim Pasha, who held office under Süleyman the Magnificent for thirteen years, had been brought to Turkey as a boy, a captive of the Barbary corsairs. Although his enemies might criticize him for his arrongance, none thought to blame him for being the son of a common Italian sailor. So, nowadays, the children of villagers can and do rise to high positions in the Republic, and nobody cares who their fathers were. The professor does not think of himself as belonging to a different order of creation from the janitor; the professor has his duties and the janitor has his duties, and each is entitled to respect from the other in the measure of his performance of those duties. (pp. 232-233)

It should also be remembered that even during the Ottoman Empire the Sultan himself was certainly never above the law. He was the guardian of it, and he could be deposed for infringing it. Many examples of this can be seen throughout Turkish history. Thirdly, Atatürk himself who imposed spectacular reforms on the Turkish people, also laid the basis for democracy. He is the one who put down the principle, that «sovereignty belongs to the people.» He abolished the Sultanate and made Parliament at least in theory, supreme in the state.

Many changes in the Turkish scene followed after the 1950 elections as a consequence of the will of the people. Since the period of Tanzimat, in the Turkish political scene, the learned, enlightened élite, who were later called the 'Young Turks', towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were the most effective elements in politics and administration. After the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, it was still mostly these people or members of their family, who became effective in the Turkish political scene. Through the myth of their being experienced in the mechanism of administration and matters of state they were able to secure important high level positions in the government and administration thus forming the bulk of the establishment. As a result of democracy, through the non-approving eyes of this old élite, another group of people literally rose power, both in Turkish politics and in the business world. The democrats considered that Turkey's economy could best be developed by the encouragement of private enterprise instead of the policy of étatism which had ruled on the economic scene since the early days of the Republic. This choice gave the Turks the possibility of growth. Turkey's remarkable vitality today, the growth of its population, their enthusiasm for betterment, their appetite for freedom which has started with Atatürk's reforms, were stimulated further with the success of democracy after 1950. Where did this new type of people in the political and the economic scene of Turkey come from? They mostly came from small market towns, shanties, and poorer districts in the larger cities. The present prime minister of Turkey, Mr. Turgut Özal, calls them «The Backbone» (Orta- direk). They have come from all these places to give him his electoral majority, as they did in 1950 to Mr. Menderes. Thus a more realistic and alternative structure of power

and influence is constructed, and the power of bureaucracy is challenged. Semi-traditional and sometimes semi-educated, yet endowed with an innate common sense and an ability to balance the odds, self-confident and proud, they are the real backbone and the driving force of the Turkish society. Through their attempts a new economic miracle has started in Turkey. These 'new men' are usually sons of poor peasants. Their characters are molded into their new role where ability to take risks and to be enterprising has to be the dominant trait. For a people that consisted traditionally of soldiers, civil servants and peasants during the Ottoman Empire and later, this is a new experience, and also a measure of the change it has undergone. Today there are outstanding Turkish businessmen, industrialists, technicians and even multi-millionaires that are taking their places in the world market.

In his recent autobiography, one of the most outspoken of the Turkish Industrial magnates who comes from a peasant family and whose father has started his career as a porter says (Sabancı, 1986) :

The story of the development of our Holding in the last forty years, in a way mirrors the development of private enterprise, as well as the realization of the development of private industry in Turkey. Private enterprise in Turkey has passed through three stages: first commerce, then large landowning and agriculture, and lastly industry. (p. 31)

That rapid change is the dominant trend in Turkey cannot be denied. Yet there are some aspects that are still unchanged, or more likely, are unchangeable. For the age-old Turkish customs and traditions have almost been preserved intact. And these characteristics are the safety-valves that we hope will protect the Turkish people from the dangers of the impersonal machinery of modern society. In Turkey the planners have defined their objective as, «development in stability and social justice». It is a worthy objective but it would sound contradictory in most other societies. For social justice might put an end to development or vice versa. Yet, the social and moral conscience inherent in the Turkish character, I believe, will be able to solve this problem, as is observed lately through the revival of private «vakf» institutions, (pious foundation), or private housing

projects by employers, or the building of schools and student hostels by wealthy people and many other such attempts that are being realized for the welfare of the society, by the members of the society.

One of the greatest achievements of the last forty years has been the building of fine roads all over Turkey. Roads do not carry a people from one settlement to another, it leads people from poverty to wealth, from underdevelopment to better development. Communication is the basis of economy. With the building of the roads in Turkey extraordinary internal migrations have flourished. The new emerging Turkish type which is nowadays the most dynamic element in Turkish society, semi-traditional, self-reliant, longing for material improvement and particularly for consumer durables, and keen to give education to their children, took to the roads. At first a great number came into the large cities and built their shanty towns in the outskirts of the cities claiming their active places in society. Afterwards, they started to migrate abroad. In the last twenty five years almost one million Turkish people have gone to Western Europe in search of jobs. As 'guestworkers' they have built the whole superstructure of the 'economic miracle' especially of West Germany in the sixties and seventies. This is an altogether remarkable event because it is the first time in history that large numbers of ordinary Turkish people from remote Anatolian villages have entered Western Europe. This has created a first-hand chance for themselves to observe and experience the virtues and vices of western civilization. Civilization partly means getting better living conditions and greater knowledge, and the Turks are certainly getting these in Europe, yet, they are getting something else too which they had not foreseen. Lately, it has become usual to read in the papers about the murder of a lone Turk, in one of the great cities of Europe, by a gang of hooligans, for the mere reason of being just a Turkish 'guest-worker'. This is an act which, I believe, conscience and common sense would condemn. I believe, Turks ought to be in Europe, at least for one reason, if for nothing else they have something to contribute to European society; while teaching themselves the advanced technical and economic knowledge of Europe, they can, in turn, teach the Europeans the truth of the human tolerance that contributed to the greatness of the Ottoman

Empire for six centuries. For, the Turks have an intuitive knowledge and deep understanding of the fundamental facts of the human situation.

Conclusions

In this symposium, we have tried to sum up the story of over a thousand years of the Turkish people who have moved westwards from the Far East to the Near East and Europe, bringing along their own civilization, and making a synthesis of the new ones they have found on their way to their new homelands, in Central Asia, Transaxonia, Persia, Syria, Anatolia, Northern Africa, The Balkans and Europe. Turks are one of the few peoples who have changed their script from Göktürk runic to Uygur, afterwards to Arabic and since 1928 to the Latin alphabet, changing it at least four times. They are a people who has achieved democracy without bloodshed for they have been open to change and freedom with an absence of class feeling in their society throughout their written history over a thousand years. They carry in themselves primarily the elements of Islam, along with rudiments of their old religions and fragments of the cultures of the ancient Anatolians like the Hittites, and many other peoples who have lived here, as well as those of the modern European and Western civilizations. While absorbing all these influences they have been able to mold a civilization all their own. They have also been able to preserve intact the customs and traditions that set them apart, and that contribute to their Turkishness. The Turkish character is undoubtedly, an unusually complex one. Yet, the aim of the current Turkish type as set forward by Atatürk is clear; «Peace at home, and peace in the world».

REFERENCES

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