

THE IDES OF APRIL  
A FUNDAMENTALIST UPRISING IN ISTANBUL IN 1909?

E. J. Zürcher

The development of secularism has been a, perhaps even the, dominant theme in the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic from the early Nineteenth Century onwards.<sup>1</sup>

Before the mid-Nineteen Twenties, when the Republican government under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (later: Atatürk) (1881-1938) expressly sought to end the political, social and cultural influence of Islamic institutions and to achieve a total dominance of the secular state over those institutions, this secularisation was not a primary aim of the policy makers, but a side effect of the policies formulated, which were aimed at strengthening the Ottoman state through the adoption of European methods.

These policies, which prevailed during most of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth century, especially during the period of the *Tanzimat*, or "reforms" (1839-1878),<sup>2</sup> were motivated primarily by two factors: Firstly, the realisation by a number of leading statesmen and bureaucrats that the only way for the Ottoman Empire to survive the onslaught of the European nation-states was imitation of their apparently successful ways and, secondly, the desire on the part of these statesmen to gain the support of the European powers and especially Britain against external enemies (mainly the Russian Empire) and internal ones (first of all Muhammad Ali Pasha, the governor of Egypt) through the adoption of measures which would inspire confidence in Europe.

One important element of the Nineteenth Century Ottoman reforms, which followed the famous edict of *Gülhane* of 1839, was formed by the creation of a modern conscripted army and navy, equipped with European hardware and the creation of a bureaucracy along Western, primarily French, lines.<sup>3</sup> Together these served to increase the hold of the central government over the provinces of the Empire to a degree which was quite unprecedented in the history of the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Even if this in itself did not necessarily constitute a secularising influence, the

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<sup>1</sup> Berkes, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Davison, 1973; Lewis, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Findley, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Yapp, 1987: 36-45.

establishment of schools and academies for the training of the new civil servants and soldiers did. The founding of these schools formed the thin edge of a wedge, which gradually eroded the position of the *ulama* in education and eventually, but only in 1924, led to the complete emancipation of the educational system from the control of the *ulama*.

The second important development of this period was the opening up of the Ottoman economy to the West, or in other words its incorporation into the capitalist world system, which followed the Ottoman-British commercial treaty of 1838.<sup>5</sup> This, too, had a secularising influence, because the legislation and the courts introduced to enable the foreigners to trade under conditions which were acceptable to them, were of a Western type and functioned outside the *Sharia*, which, at least theoretically, had been the basis of the Ottoman legal system in the past.

In the third place, the Ottoman reformists felt compelled to comply with Western demands on the very sensitive issue of the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Empire, introducing the concept of equal Ottoman citizenship for all. The introduction of this concept, which of course had no place in the *Sharia*, was a form of radical secularisation, even if it did not strike root in the mentality of the great majority of the Muslim, or indeed Christian population.

In the second half of the century, especially after the *Islahat Fermani* edict of 1856 (which was seen as being issued under foreign pressure), these developments, and the privileged position which the Christian minorities of the Empire managed to gain under the aegis of the European powers, led to growing resentment to the policies of the *Tanzimat* on the part of the Muslim population.<sup>6</sup> This resentment found expression in conspiracies, popular uprisings and anti-Christian riots such as that in Syria in 1860, but it also played a role in the criticism of the emerging Muslim intelligentsia, the second generation reformers who were active in the 1860's and 70's, the so-called "Young Ottomans." The aim of the latter was to limit the power of the new bureaucrats through the introduction of a constitutional, parliamentary monarchy, which in their eyes was fundamentally consistent with Islam.<sup>7</sup>

The Young Ottoman programme was realised with the introduction of the Ottoman constitution in 1876,<sup>8</sup> but the new Sultan, Abdulhamid II, who had taken part in the discussions of the Young Ottomans himself, soon reverted to autocratic rule, suspending constitution and parliament. Abdulhamid, while continuing the modernisations of the *Tanzimat* in many ways, emphasized the Islamic character of

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<sup>5</sup> Pamuk, 1987; Keyder, 1987: 27-48; Kasaba, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Davison, 1973: 100-102; Yapp, 1987: 112-114.

<sup>7</sup> Mardin, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Devereux, 1963: 21-94; Davison, 1973: 358-408.

his reign and of the Empire, to counterbalance the influence of Western liberal ideas.<sup>9</sup>

During his reign, the agitation for a return to constitutional and parliamentary rule continued, however, and even gained a far broader basis through the expansion of modern, Western-type education in the Empire.<sup>10</sup> The constitutional movement started to expand rapidly in the 1890s, but in 1896 the Hamidian police succeeded in crushing the underground movement and for the next ten years the reformists were active mostly as exiles: in Cairo, Geneva and first and foremost: Paris. There the movement eventually crystallized into two distinct factions: the nationalist and centralist one around Ahmet Riza (the Committee of Union and Progress - *Ittihad ve Terakki Djemiyeti*) and the liberal and decentralist one around Prince Sabahettin (The League for Private Initiative and Decentralisation - *Teshebbüs-ü Shahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Djemiyeti*).<sup>11</sup>

From 1906 onwards, the constitutional movement underwent a new period of growth within the Empire, especially within the Ottoman armies in European Turkey. Basically, this was an autonomous growth, but the movement merged with the faction of Ahmet Riza and adopted its name, "Committee of Union and Progress" (C.U.P.), in 1907.<sup>12</sup>

In July 1908 this organisation by threat of armed intervention succeeded in forcing the Sultan to restore the constitution and reconvene parliament. After this revolution, the C.U.P. did not take over power itself. In the Ottoman context of 1908 junior officers and civil servants were simply not acceptable as members of government. Neither did the Unionists see in themselves the ability to govern. Instead they left government in the hands of a senior statesman of the old regime with a relatively liberal reputation, Kibrisli Kâmil Pasha (1832-1912), and set themselves up as a sort of watchdog committee.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to their superior organisation, the parliamentary elections of the Autumn of 1908 resulted in a complete Unionist victory but here, too, the Unionist influence remained indirect rather than direct, because in many parts of the Empire they had to rely on local notables who allowed their names to be put forward as candidates on the Unionist list, rather than on members of the C.U.P. itself.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, 1961 174-182, Shaw, 1977 172-272

<sup>10</sup> Shaw, 1977 112-113

<sup>11</sup> Hanioglu, 1986, Ramsaur, 1957

<sup>12</sup> Zurcher, 1984 19-44

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad, 1969 15-21

<sup>14</sup> Akshun, 1987 107-108

After the astounding success of the revolution, the C.U.P. was the most powerful force in the country, but increasingly through 1908 and the early months of 1909 it had to contend with two types of opposition. One was that of the followers of Prince Sabahattin, united since September in the *Ahrar Firkasi* (Liberal Party),<sup>15</sup> who had done badly in the elections and felt increasingly frustrated. Kâmil Pasha, who, like the Liberals, resented the pressure of the C.U.P., allied himself with this group and relations between him and the C.U.P. became increasingly strained. On February, 14th, the C.U.P. succeeded in having the Grand Vizier voted out of office in parliament and having him replaced with Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha (1855-1921), who was close to the Committee.<sup>16</sup> Hereafter a bitter press campaign was started by the opposition, which was answered by the Unionist organs in kind. On April, 6th, Hasan Fehmi, the editor of one of the fiercest anti-Unionist papers, *Serbesti*, was killed on the Galata-bridge, probably by a Unionist agent. His funeral the next day turned into a mass demonstration against the Committee.<sup>17</sup>

The second type of opposition which faced the C.U.P. was that by conservative religious circles, notably the lower *ulama* and sheykh of the *tarikats*. During the month of Ramadan, which coincided with October 1908, there were a number of incidents and at least two serious and violent demonstrations, during which the closure of bars and theaters, the prohibition of photography and restrictions on the freedom of movement of women were demanded.<sup>18</sup> On April 3d, the religious extremists, who were already active as a group around the newspaper *Volkan* of the Nakhsbandi Sheykh Derwish Wahdeti, organised themselves as the *Ittihad-i Muhammedi* (Muhammadan Union), whose president was considered to be the prophet himself.<sup>19</sup> This group organised large-scale propaganda against the policies and mentality of the Young Turks.

In spite of all this political infighting and the rising tensions of the past months, it came as a complete surprise to Unionists and foreign observers alike, when, on the night of 12/13 April 1909 an armed insurrection broke out in the capital in the name of the restoration of Islam and *Sharia*. Within twenty-four hours the insurgents took over the capital without meeting significant opposition from government, C.U.P. or the Army. In the capital, the Committee seemed vanquished, but its position in the provinces, most of all in Macedonia, remained intact and within a fortnight troops loyal to the C.U.P. suppressed the counterrevolution and re-established the Commit-

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<sup>15</sup> Tunaya, 1952 239-247

<sup>16</sup> Akshun, 1987 110-116

<sup>17</sup> Akshun, 1987 122-123

<sup>18</sup> Guven, 1989 1

<sup>19</sup> Tunaya, 1952 261-275

tee in power. In spite of the ease with which the insurrection was suppressed, however, the *31 Mart Wak'asi*, or 31st of March Incident, as it is known in Turkish history because of its date in the old *Rumi* calendar, made a deep impression on the reformists. The fact that a revolt in the name of Islam had been able to shake the foundations of their regime so easily and quickly, came as a rude shock to them. The Kemalists, who succeeded the Unionists after the First World War and went on to found the secular republic of Turkey, had nearly all of them been members of the C.U.P. Therefore, the memory, or trauma, of the 1909 revolt was theirs, too. To the supporters of secularism in Turkey the 31st of March incident served as a constant reminder of the danger of Islamic fundamentalism. Even today, whenever the secular system of government of Turkey seems threatened, references to the incident are frequently made.

After a short description of the events of April, 1909, and a survey of their possible causes and instigators, I shall address the question whether the qualification "fundamentalist" is adequate or even helpful in this context. At the same time, I shall try to determine the place of the events of 1909 in the development of the relations between Islam and the state in modern Turkey.

Quite an extensive secondary literature, both scholarly and popular, exists on the subject, based on memoirs,<sup>20</sup> newspaper reports and foreign archives. The Turkish archives as yet do not seem to have been used for the study of this subject to any extent<sup>21</sup>. For this occasion I have looked into the Dutch legation reports, kept in the State Archives in The Hague (*ARA*).

The coverage given in these records to the insurrection and its prelude and aftermath is quite extensive (reports being sent daily during the crisis) and, given the limitations of intelligence gathering by a small embassy, the quality is quite remarkable. Even if it offers no startling revelations, it does give a detailed picture of what happened, and a good "feel" for the period.

The crisis of April 1909 lasted for eleven days only. During the night of the 12th on the 13th of April the battalions of Macedonian troops at Tashkishla barracks which had been brought in only a week before by the C.U.P. to replace the (supposedly less reliable) Arab and Albanian troops,<sup>22</sup> mutinied, after having taken their officers prisoner. Together with a large number of *softas*, students from the

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<sup>20</sup> The most important scholarly literature is by Bayur (1983 182-217 and Akshin (1987 121-140) For popular literature based on memoirs see Danishmend (1986), Yalçın (1934-36), Adıvar (1926)

<sup>21</sup> A new and far more liberal archival regime was established in Turkey in 1989. Theoretically all the materials pertinent to the events of 1909 should now be open to researchers. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the restrictive clauses which have been built into the new regulations and which can be operated by the authorities if they see fit, will constitute an impediment

<sup>22</sup> *ARA*, 471/162 (1 4 1909), *ARA*, 506/175 (6 4 1909)

religious schools, they marched to the *At Meydanı* where the parliament building stood. During the morning, more and more troops and *ulama* joined them. The government was in disarray, did not dare to send in the loyal troops, but instead sent the Chief of Police to listen to the demands of the mob. The spokesmen of the insurgent troops formulated six demands:

- dismissal of the Grand Vizier and the Ministers of War and of the Navy
- replacement of a number of Unionist officers
- replacement of the Unionist President of the Chamber of Deputies (Ahmet Rıza)
- banishing of a number of Unionist deputies from Istanbul
- restoration of the *Sharia*
- an amnesty for the rebellious troops <sup>23</sup>

Confronted with these demands, the Grand Vizier went to the palace in the afternoon and tendered his resignation, which was accepted by the Sultan. The next morning, it was announced that the colourless diplomat Tevfik Pasha (Okday) (1845-1936) had been appointed Grand Vizier. The War Minister in the new cabinet, Marshal Ethem Pasha visited the soldiers at the *At Meydanı*, praised them and promised them that all their demands would be met <sup>24</sup>.

The troops and the *softas* celebrated their victory extensively. At the same time, a pogrom against known Unionists developed, resulting in the deaths of at least twenty people, mostly officers, but also two deputies, who were mistaken for Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), the editor of the Unionist organ *Tanın*, and Ahmet Rıza. The offices of the *Tanın* were also sacked <sup>25</sup>.

The Unionists went underground or fled the capital. As a result, the Chamber of Deputies, in which the CUP held the majority, did not have a quorum. Nevertheless, the deputies who did attend, at the instigation of the Liberal (and Albanian) deputy İsmail Kemal Bey (Vlora) accepted the demands of the soldiers and at the same time issued a proclamation, saying that *Sharia* and constitution would be maintained <sup>26</sup>.

From the first day on, the leaders of the *Ahrar* tried without success to get a grip on events and to prevent the insurrection from moving into a reactionary, anti-constitutionalist and pro-Abdulhamid direction. It should be noted, too, that the higher ranking *ulama* (those who in the ambassador's report are called "ulama", as opposed to the "Hojas" who supported the revolt), who were united in the *Djemiyet-i*

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<sup>23</sup> ARA 543/191 (14 4 1909)

<sup>24</sup> ARA 546/192 (15 4 1909)

<sup>25</sup> Adivar 1926 279 Akşın 1987 127

<sup>26</sup> ARA 550/194 (16 4 1909)

*İlmîye-i İslamiye* ("Society of the Islamic Scholarly Profession") never supported the insurrection and from the 16th onwards openly denounced it.<sup>27</sup>

The C.U.P. had been driven out of Istanbul, but had kept its position in the provinces, notably in Macedonia, and it started to take countermeasures right away. It organised public demonstrations in the provincial towns, and showered the parliament and palace with telegrams.<sup>28</sup> In Macedonia especially it easily won the propaganda battle, convincing the population that the constitution was in danger. From the Fifteenth it started the organisation of a military campaign against the rebels. The "Action Army" (*Hareket Ordusu*) as it was termed, consisted of regular units of the Third and Second Armies, reinforced with volunteer units, which consisted mostly of Albanians, led by Niyazi Bey, one of the heroes of the revolution of 1908.<sup>29</sup> By train, these troops were moved first to Çatalca and Hademköy and then to Ayastefanos (nowadays Yeshilköy) on the outskirts of Istanbul.<sup>30</sup>

The Chamber of Deputies sent a delegation to the Army headquarters to try to prevent it from taking the city by force, but it met with no positive response, after which the members of the delegation decided to stay in Ayastefanos and issued a call to their colleagues to join them. From the 22nd onwards both chambers of parliament sat together in Ayastefanos as a "National Assembly" (*medjlis-i umumi-i milli*).<sup>31</sup>

In the early morning of the 24th of April, the Action Army began the occupation of the city. It did not encounter much resistance - only at the Taksim and Tashkishla barracks did the resistance amount to anything. At four o'clock in the afternoon the last rebels had surrendered.<sup>32</sup>

In the aftermath of the suppression of the revolt, and under martial law, two courts martial were instituted, which convicted and executed a large number of the rebels, including Derwish Wahdeti. A number of *Ahrar* leaders were arrested, but set free again under British pressure. On the 27th, the two chambers of parliament, still sitting together, deposed Sultan Abdulhamid, who was succeeded by his younger brother Mehmet Resat.<sup>33</sup>

Now, after this brief overview of the events, let us try to summarize the causes of the revolt, the demands of the insurgents and the reaction of the Unionists, in

<sup>27</sup> *ARA*, 553/196 (17 4 1909)

<sup>28</sup> Danışmend, 1986, 40-97

<sup>29</sup> *ARA*, 553/196 (17 4 1909)

<sup>30</sup> *ARA*, 578/200 (20 4 1909)

<sup>31</sup> Aksin, 1987, 133

<sup>32</sup> *ARA*, 601/206 (25 4 1909)

<sup>33</sup> *ARA*, 624/214 (27 4 1909, *ARA* 636/219 (29 4 1909))

order to establish the character of the insurgency and its place in modern Turkish history

Several different causes for the events of April 1909 can be discerned. Different groups had become disenchanted with the constitutional regime for different reasons. The overthrow of the old regime in itself had hurt those who had earned a living or enjoyed status as members of the Hamidian apparatus, including the thousand of government spies active in Istanbul, who had supplied the Sultan with their *journals*.

The rationalising policies of the new government, which aimed at ending the overstaffing of the government departments which had been the result of the favouritism of the old regime, had already made thousands of civil servants of all ranks jobless. In a city like Istanbul, where government was the main industry this had far-reaching consequences.

In the army, the main source of trouble was the friction between the *mektepli* officers, who had been trained in the military schools and academy, and the *alaylı* officers, who had risen through the ranks. The latter had been favoured by the old regime, being paid regularly and stationed in the First Army in and around Istanbul, while the former had been mistrusted (rightly so, because it was these modern educated officers who brought about the constitutional revolution of 1908). Now the *mektepli* officers had taken over. Many of the *alaylı* officers had been dismissed or demoted and even worse the whole system of promotion from the ranks was discontinued. The troops themselves, too, had reason for discontent. They had been used to the very slack discipline and relaxed atmosphere of the old army and were now confronted with young officers who wanted to impose Prussian training methods, among other things abolishing the pauses for ablutions and prayers during the exercises.<sup>34</sup>

While no explicitly secularist legislation had been enacted in the eight months since the constitutional revolution, the lower *ulama* clearly felt threatened by the change in atmosphere, which the constitutional revolution had brought about. One particular measure, which aroused feeling among this group was that, by which students at the religious schools who did not pass their exams in time, were no longer exempted from military service.<sup>35</sup>

The discord within the Young Turk ranks, with the *Ahrar* opposing what they saw as the irresponsible policies and the monopoly of power of the Unionists also helped to create the atmosphere in which the revolt could take place. The debate between the two factions grew more and more fierce in the first months of 1909. This verbal extremism, which could easily spill over into real violence (as in the

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<sup>34</sup> Guven 1989 1 Aksin, 1987 121

<sup>35</sup> Guven 1989 2



Hasan Fehmi affair) helped to create a climate in which political opposition came to be regarded as treason. The Dutch legation several times noted that in this way the Young Turks would leave the field open to the conservatives<sup>36</sup>. The exaggerated and immoderate political debate, with its personal attacks, was characteristic both of the Young Turk era and of the Kemalist period. (And even, one might add, of Turkish politics of recent years)

Finally, one contributing factor to the crisis was the fact that the Unionists were out of touch with important parts of public opinion, and thus were completely taken by surprise by the discontent which existed even among their own Macedonian troops. The Young Turks in all guises (Unionists, Liberals and Kemalists) were always very much an enlightened elite, who saw it as their task to educate the masses. Their positivist, liberal and nationalist vision was not supported by what, in a European context, would be considered its natural base, an emerging indigenous bourgeoisie, but forced on a conservative and deeply religious population from above.

Thus, a number of factors can be pointed to as having contributed to a climate, in which the insurrection could take place. But who was or who were the actual instigators? This has been the subject of a lot of speculation, both at the time of the revolt and later<sup>37</sup>.

In all its statements, the CUP characterised the insurrection as an instance of "reaction" (*irtidja*). It laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of Sultan Abdulhamid and the religious opposition of the *Itihad ı Muhammadi* of Sheykh Wahdetı. At the time, the hand of the Sultan was also seen in the fact, reported on by the Dutch legation that the insurgents had ample funds and that the soldiers had apparently been paid in gold<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, it is clear that all through the eleven days of the revolt, the Sultan acted with extreme caution. While he did not openly disavow the soldiers, he never openly supported their demands or tried to lead their movement. When the Action Army entered the city, he apparently greeted it with relief and ordered the palace troops not to offer resistance. All through the revolt he made the impression of being frightened and demoralised<sup>39</sup>. In his memoirs, he later denied having had anything to do with the revolt.

Conservative opinion in Turkey has sometimes accused the Unionists of stage-managing the whole revolt in order to be able to establish a dictatorship, adducing

<sup>1</sup> ARA 490/172 (5 4 1909)

<sup>37</sup> Guven 1989 1

<sup>38</sup> ARA 553/196 (17 4 1909)

<sup>39</sup> Akshin 1987 127 Bayur 183 186 187 Danismend 1986 21 23

the fact that the revolt started in the Macedonian battalions as proof<sup>40</sup> This, however, seems fanciful, in view of the patent unpreparedness of leading Unionists, who had to flee or go underground, some of them just escaping being lynched. No trace of evidence for this thesis has ever been found.

The demands, formulated by the insurgents and the evidence given before the Courts Martial and in the memoirs of opposition leaders point to the political opposition, the *Ahrar* as the prime movers<sup>41</sup> The selective way, in which the insurgents attacked Unionist individuals and offices also supports this view. At the same time, it is clear that the religious opposition around Sheykh Wahdeti and the *Ittihad-i Muhammedi* played a very important part in organizing the uprising and in rousing the troops<sup>42</sup> Most probably the liberal opposition was the original instigator of the revolt. Overestimating its own strength, it thought it could use the religious groups for that purpose, but soon after the start of the revolt, it became clear that it was in no position to exert control. The willingness of one group of basically secularist reformers to conclude an opportunistic alliance with Islamic groups in its struggle for power with another group of reformers, in the mistaken belief that less sophisticated religious groups can be easily manipulated is again a recurring phenomenon in the politics of modern Turkey

There were persistent rumours in 1909, reflected in the literature on the episode, that Great Britain was behind the uprising The gold distributed among the troops made many people suspicious and attention was drawn to the close links between the leaders of the *Ahrar* and the British embassy. No hard evidence of British involvement has ever come to light, however.

Now I come to the question of the fundamentalist Islamic character of the revolt There is no denying that the call for reinstatement of the *Sharia* played a large role in the insurrection, which was seen by Unionists and foreign observers such as the Dutch envoy alike as a reactionary Islamic movement On the other hand, there are good grounds to consider this label inadequate Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, there is strong evidence that the Liberals, who were no more Islamic or fundamentalist than the Unionists, instigated the revolt Secondly, there is no relation whatsoever between the call for the *Sharia* and the other demands put forward Thirdly, the insurgents never formulated specific demands for the way the *Sharia* should be implemented Neither did they demand the dissolution of parliament and/or the prorogation of the constitution The function of the call for the *Sharia* seems to have been limited to that of legitimizing the uprising and providing it with a rallying-cry

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<sup>40</sup> Guven, 1989 1

<sup>41</sup> Akshun, 1987 128-130, Bayur 1983 184-185

<sup>42</sup> *ARA*, 540/190 (13 4 1909)

The C.U.P., in its counter-propaganda, immediately identified the insurrection as *irtidja* (political reaction), which endangered constitution and parliament. This may have been in part a psychological reaction. Both their own positivist ideology and their history of struggle against Sultan Abdulhamid's regime had conditioned them to see religious conservatism as the main threat to the realisation of their ideals. The 31 March Incident seems to have been a genuinely traumatic experience for the Unionists. It cannot be denied, however, that labeling the insurrection as reactionary and Islamic also had practical political advantages: it enabled the Committee to isolate their opponents by posing as the defenders of the constitution, thereby attracting the support of those Young Turks who shared their secularist outlook, but had become disenchanted with the Committee's policies after the revolution. This way they could eliminate the liberal opposition by identifying them with the reaction. It also gave them a chance to dethrone Abdulhamid, something which they had not been able to do in 1908 and which was seen by them (and also by neutral observers) as essential to the consolidation of their position.<sup>43</sup>

In both respects, the use of the call for the *Sharia* as battle-cry by the opposition and the labeling of the revolt as *irtidja* by the Unionists, an interesting comparison is afforded by the insurrection of Sheykh Sait (a Nahskbandi sheykh, just like Derwish Wahdeti) in Eastern Turkey in February 1925.<sup>44</sup> This revolt was at least partly Kurdish-nationalist in character and it was motivated by discontent with the social and economic situation in the Kurdish provinces. Nevertheless, the leaders used the call for the *Sharia* as a rallying-cry. The rebellion was immediately labeled as *irtidja* by the then Turkish government (which consisted of former Unionists) and subsequently suppressed with the utmost severity. The Prime Minister, Fethi (Okyar), explicitly compared the situation to that of April 1909 in a speech in the National Assembly.<sup>45</sup> It was on this occasion that, through an amendment to the High Treason Law, the political use of religion was outlawed in Turkey for the first time (it has remained so ever since). The High Treason Law was subsequently used to suppress the liberal opposition within the National Assembly, the Progressive Republican Party, the left-wing opposition outside the Assembly and the opposition press, even though none of these could be linked to the Kurdish rebellion.

After the suppression of both the Islamic, the socialist and the liberal opposition in 1925, the Kemalist regime intensified its drive to crush institutionalized Islam. Unfortunately, this policy also strengthened the tendency, already evident in 1909, for Islam to become the vehicle for opposition to the policies of an authoritarian

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<sup>43</sup> *ARA*, 562/199 (19.4.1909).

<sup>44</sup> Olson, 1989: 91-127

<sup>45</sup> *ZD*, 306-311.

state, and so, in turn, to make the supporters of the secular state allergic to expressions of Islamic feeling. This seems to be the vicious circle in which the debate on the relation between Islam and state has been caught in Turkey for much of this century.

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