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TALÂT PAŞA [TALÂT PASHA] (1943)

Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın

People

Talât Pasha: He is one of the prominent figures of the Second Constitutional Period. His father, Ahmet Vasif Efendi, was an examiner. Talât studied at Alliance Israelite School for two years and continued in law school until the second year. He worked in both the Postal and Telegraph Corporation as a clerk and Alliance School as a Turkish language instructor. However, he was sentenced to three years because of his political tendencies. After two years, in 1898, he was pardoned and then worked as a chief clerk in the Postal and Telegraph Corporation. Yet, in 1907, he was dismissed because of his relationship with the Committee of Union and Progress. Later, he became an MP, the minister of internal affairs, and the last grand vizier of the Party of Union and Progress. In 1918, when the armistice was accepted, he had to flee to Europe and was shot dead on the street in 1921.

Events

Although the name of the book is Talât Pasha, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın shares his reflections on the Second Constitutional Period and a few memories highlighting Talât Pasha's some character traits. It is worth noting that his reflections in this book are more superficial and less critical than those published in *Political Memories*. Thus, the book does not proceed in chronological order of events.

The Spirit of the Committee of Union and Progress

Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın says that he feels compelled to explain about the revolution of the Committee of Union and Progress because anyone intending to understand Talât Pasha should consider his social and political environment.

He says that the committee attempted to document its history but could not achieve it. At Mehmet Cavit's insistence, Talât Pasha, too, began to write his life story, but could not finish because of the war. Hüseyin Cahit prepares this unfinished work for publication in 1946. However, he specifies that we still do not have enough material to enlighten the period. For the press, the first destination to understand any modern era was full of articles against the committee. It was blamed for cruelty and oppressiveness, and committee members could not have a chance to endear themselves to people amidst political turmoil and war.

Although in his political **memories**, he criticizes that the Committee of Union and Progress did not let the Party of Union and Progress act as an independent political entity, in this book, he exalts the committee because it could protect its spirit. He even mystifies the relationship between the first members of the committee. For Hüseyin Cahit, there were original committee members who experienced the committee like a religion; as they took an oath by placing their hand on Qur'an and weapon, an invisible entity inspired them the love of country. They were linked to each other by a bond of fraternity. They would call each other "brother," and whenever a committee member came across another committee member, he would embrace him as his brother. In this manner, Hüseyin Cahit distinguishes a political party from a committee. He argues that a political party is to represent the interests of a defined group. However, a committee is composed of people who are ready to sacrifice their lives in honor of their country. Since the committee was active under an oppressive regime, a small mistake could cause someone's death. Thus, committee members were not allowed to blunder. This constant danger generated the feeling of brotherhood among committee members.

After the Constitution

Hüseyin Cahit says that when the constitution was re-enacted, it was told that freedom came to the country. However, some people even did not know what it was. Some described it as a nun who came from abroad. There was a lack of authority in the country. People demanded that the elites of the old regime be punished. Yet as they saw that law enforcement did not realize their demand, they took the

former ministers, detectives, and pashas to the jail. Some unmilitary and military young men tried to control the streets. However, there was no anarchy, thanks to the committee.

The committee was a secret organization. But when the constitution is re-enacted, the center and members became visible. Many opportunists joined it for personal gain. Some of them pretended to be the leader of the branch in their city. It did not have a leader; yet, Hüseyin Cahit states that Talât Pasha came forward with his devotion, ingenuity, and belief.

However, the old elite still held the most important positions. The committee re-enacted the constitution but did not exercise power. Some military members joined the committee, but it was problematic because the committee member soldier could go against his superior. Thus, the committee prohibited soldiers from engaging in politics and turned the committee into a political party. However, some soldiers did not break their ties with the committee as some members of parliament. Thus, in time, the first impression faded. People who could not benefit from committee membership, or offended the committee, or lost their **advantages** because of the committee began to attack it through the press. They called committee members “invisible hands” and “evil spirits” governing people in charge. Hüseyin Cahit says that these opponents benefited from the freedom the committee provided them.

A Disintegrating Empire and the Committee

Hüseyin Cahit maintains that although the committee was in power between the years of 1908 and 1918, it was active only for six years. The years from 1914 to 1918 deserve a different analysis because of the war. During the revolutionary six-year-period, it had to deal with many internal and external problems since the Ottoman Empire was in the final stages of its downfall.

He mentions two problems that the committee had to face. First, ethnic elements conflicted, creating a security problem. In Rumelia, the gendarmerie was under the control of the Western world. So, any case of Christian villagers was put forward as proof of the Turkish state's persecution. Ambassadors intervened in internal affairs to realize their political aims in the Ottoman Empire. He says that the re-enactment of the constitution created a hesitation among the Western countries. However, they did not give up on their dream; a collapsed empire ready to be divided. In this manner, the international press always accused the committee of oppressing the minorities.

However, the ethnic problems were not confined to the Christian elements. He argues that although Arabs or Albanians were proud of their ancestry, Turkish people could not even say that they were Turks. The empire treated each Muslim community the same, hence the dominance of Arabs, Albanians, and other ethnic elements in the administration and the military. Yet Turkish villagers were under a heavy tax burden. Second, the committee tried to ensure the dominance of the Turks throughout the empire. However, some Turks were in favor of decentralization. Hüseyin Cahit expresses that the government had neither prestige nor power. Thus, decentralization meant to tear the country with their own hands.

The Committee in Power

Hüseyin Cahit underlines that the period of the Committee of Union and Progress was between 1908 and 1918. However, it was not in power from July 1912 to January 1913. The committee re-enacted the constitution and stayed in power until July 1912. During the interval, the Balkan Wars erupted, and the committee came to power again just a few months before the defeat. Thus, Hüseyin Cahit insists that the reason for the defeat was the removal of the committee from management. As an example of incompetence in the war process, he quotes that when Ismail Hakkı Pasha, the quartermaster, was in charge again, he found documents including a plan to be used in the case of mobilization untouched in the safe. So, it would be unfair to attribute the defeat to the committee members.

However, Hüseyin Cahit claims that the committee could not dominate the empire because its members were not aware that they were entitled to govern. Furthermore, he adds that had they replaced the old elite immediately after the re-enactment of the constitution, people would have strongly resisted them. Thus, the first grand vizier was Sait Pasha. As the sultan still retained the authority to appoint interior and defense ministers, Sait Pasha's cabinet could not stand the righteous criticisms and then collapsed. Kâmil Pasha, Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, and Hakkı Pasha followed him. They were important figures of the old regime. Then Mahmut Şevket Pasha, who was the leader of the Action Army, became the grand vizier. Since he was a person who preferred to act independently,

Hüseyin Cahit does not count his administration as part of the committee program. He states that only after the raid on the Sublime Porte, Sait Halim Pasha established his cabinet, could the committee seize power in 1913, but it did not last long because the war erupted in 1914.

The Place of Talât Pasha in the Committee

Hüseyin Cahit appreciates Talât Pasha's life experience rather than his educational background. After the constitution was reinstated, conservative, liberal, and radical groups emerged within the committee. Talât Pasha was **a quick-witted person** and managed to supervise these different groups on his own.

Some believed that everything would be settled violently. Some were fanatically religious and adamantly aimed to control each aspect of social life. Hüseyin Cahit states that they were the real enemies, and Talât Pasha dealt with them the most. Another group of people was more ambitious and reformist. While the religious wing blamed the committee of being irreligious, these reformists blamed it for possessing oppressive features. These separatist groups left the committee in time, but the committee continued to oscillate between the conservatives and reformists. It pursued a conservative and opportunist policy because these were Talât Pasha's features. For Hüseyin Cahit, Talât Pasha was ready to die for his country, but he did not have a daring personality. For example, Talât could raid on the Sublime Porte but would not support women's emancipation or the replacement of the Arabic letters with the Latin alphabet. Since parliament was mostly composed of people who could not comprehend differentiation between the state and religion, Talât Pasha oscillated between conservative and reformist groups to keep the committee intact.

Talât Pasha's Character

Hüseyin Cahit shares a few stories to highlight Talât Pasha's character traits.

On his intelligence While working as an instructor at the Alliance Israelite School, he is arrested. The officers question him about a letter found at the house of one of his friends. In the letter, it is written, "Things are going well." However, he tricks the officers into thinking that he wrote the letter to a friend of him, and the sentence was to describe his affair with the daughter of the school principal. Then, the officers interrogate the girl, and the girl confirms what Talât said to protect him.

On his playfulness Talât's old friend Faik is the chief clerk of Grand Vizier Mehmet Ferit Pasha, and Talât secretly works for the committee in Adrianople. One day, the vizier sends Faik to Rumelia, and Faik cannot resist his desire to see his old friend, Talât. Talât welcomes Faik with great joy and takes him to the secret gathering place of the committee. As they come in, Talât introduces Faik to his friends, and his friends are shocked as the grand vizier's chief clerk stands in front of them. Then, Talât explains his friendship with Faik, and everybody feels relieved.

On his attitude toward a privileged status During the World War, the state rations bread. When Ismail Hakkı Pasha visits Talât at home, he sees Talât and his family eat rationed bread. The next day, he summons Talât's driver out and gives him white bread in a bag. Talât's family happily receives the bag. But after he comes home, he sends the bag back to Ismail Hakkı Pasha.

Similarly, when he becomes grand vizier, he does not move the grand vizier's mansion, thinking it would be hard to leave when they get used to living in it. He prefers to stay at his old house.

On his authoritarian personality Hüseyin Cahit mentions a note written about Talât Pasha by Süleyman Nazif, a writer, and bureaucrat. It says that the real authority was Talât Pasha for ten years; he commanded as he wished, reduced anything he did not like to ashes. His violence scared even the sultan in such a way that Sultan Reşat thought of himself as Talât Pasha's shadow.

Themes

Contextuality: Although the name of the book is Talât Pasha, Hüseyin Cahit gives a great deal of importance to the Committee of Union and Progress. He states that since Talât Pasha is a political personality, he cannot be understood without his social and political environment. In that regard, Hüseyin Cahit considers anything related to the committee something decisive in Talât Pasha's life.

The book is to demonstrate that long-lasting socio-economic and political problems in the country, international media pressure, and different groups within the committee shaped Talât Pasha's persona. Talât Pasha, as an MP, the minister of internal affairs, and the grand vizier, embraced some features that he expected to work the best for his position while facing these problems. Thus, Hüseyin Cahit invites his readers to evaluate Talât Pasha within this context.

However, he does not put events in chronological order and explain what effect they had on Talât Pasha. For example, he quotes Süleyman Nazif's words but does not exemplify any specific moment in which Talât Pasha showed his authority. He lists the problems that the committee had to face, yet, he does not explain how the committee dealt with them.