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Walter F. Weiker

# The Ottoman Bureaucracy: Modernization and Reform

*This paper discusses the attempts by the rulers of the Ottoman empire to modernize the society—by modernizing the bureaucracy to implement reforms needs as: promotion of Ottomanism as a counter ideology to nationalism, reform of provincial administration, and an Ottoman constitution. The reformers were so strongly committed to Ottoman values, that they could not become committed to the radical social and political changes required for modernization. As a result, the changes made in the bureaucracy only increased the ascriptive orientation of the society, and continued the authoritarian rule. Commitment to fundamental social and political change would seem to be among the conditions for bureaucrats to help effect modernization in underdeveloped countries.*

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FROM about 1826 to 1877, the Ottoman government at Istanbul made a major effort at revitalizing its empire, which had been declining at an increasingly precipitous rate since its expansion had been halted at Vienna at the end of the 17th century. This effort sought to modernize the empire by adopting some social, political and technological institutions from the West. The reforms were

<sup>1</sup> The term "Ottoman" when used in this article denotes membership in a small ruling group characterized by Muslim religion, loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty, and "Ottoman culture," a strong sense of belonging to an exclusive upper class (often including the conviction that only they were fit to rule), and sharp social, cultural, and intellectual separation from the rest of the population.

to be implemented by a "modernized" civil bureaucracy. The effort failed in its primary goal of arresting the empire's decline, although the Ottomans<sup>1</sup> did delay the eclipse of their state for almost another hundred years, and in the process laid the groundwork on which 20th century Turkish modernizers were able to build. This article explores some of the reasons for their failure as they relate to the problems of stability and change and to some problems of modernizing a bureaucracy in a traditional setting.<sup>2</sup>

The chief hypothesis is that Ottoman reformers were faced with the necessity of modernization, but could not commit themselves to more than reform. Although a few exceptional bureaucrats<sup>3</sup> and others recognized clearly that the possibilities of internal rejuvenation of the empire would be greatly enhanced by modern administrative practices—achievement orientation, recruitment and promotion on the basis of professional merit, rational organization, rationalization of authority, and such political underpinnings as equality of citizens before the law in practice as well as doctrine—even the most determined reformers did not, indeed could not, commit themselves to more than reform, that is, the rearrangement of structural units of the government or improvement of current practices without fundamental social or political alterations.

Such a commitment was not forthcoming for several reasons. First, by the time a bureaucrat reached the higher ranks from which he might make an effort at real reform, he himself was deeply committed to Ottoman values and not disposed to give up fundamental bases of the Ottoman system, such as an Islamic state, or the advantages derived from their status. Second, since the social structure of the empire was highly elitist, if a bureaucrat had tried to be a public servant in the modern sense of the term, he would probably have been ridiculed by others of his class, and gone unappreciated by peasant and urban, lower-class subjects.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1964 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Research for this paper was aided in part by a grant from the Research Council of Rutgers University.

<sup>3</sup> A "bureaucrat" in Ottoman empire terms included anyone trained in the schools and offices of the administrative organization, which was entirely distinct from both the military and ecclesiastical hierarchies even though both of these were institutions of the state also.

Third, the Ottoman reformers could not expect the satisfaction of seeing the results of their reforms, for the society was such that the prospects of achieving goals like national identification, prosperity, or efficiency were very remote.

Since the reformers were not committed to modernization, changes directed at the improvement of the structure of the bureaucracy did not achieve the effects sought.<sup>4</sup> Such a bureaucracy could not transform a society, and most of the reform schemes—Ottomanism as a counter-ideology to nationalism, reforms in provincial administration, an Ottoman constitution—floundered.

### HISTORICAL REVIEW

The Ottoman Empire at this period was a group of provinces extending from North Africa and the Arab states to the Balkans. The many nationalities were bound together only administratively; culturally and economically, they had been left largely autonomous. Economic development was left to the local peoples, with the result that many areas, particularly those east of the Balkans, remained extremely poor, rural and dominated by tradition. Since the 17th century, the jurisdiction of the Ottoman government had been encroached upon by separatist nationalism (particularly in the Balkans) and European military, economic, and political imperialism. By the 19th century, the Ottoman hold on the Balkans was very tenuous; European inroads such as the Capitulations<sup>5</sup> had made non-Muslims in the empire virtually independent; and Mohammed Ali of Egypt almost captured Istanbul itself. The problem of saving the empire was extremely urgent.

In the face of this decline, there came to the throne after 1789 a line of strong sultans, who sought to lead the empire back to the

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of modernization and modern administration see Joseph LaPalombara, (ed.), *Bureaucracy and Political Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ., 1963).

There is very little information available about the Ottoman bureaucracy as an institution. This paucity of data is due both to the interests of Ottoman scholars and writers (who were often chroniclers) and to the orientation which most Western students of the Ottoman Empire have taken. For example, it is extremely difficult to find even an estimate of the size of the bureaucracy at various times.

<sup>5</sup> Special concessions granted by the Ottoman government, often under pressure, to foreign governments and companies.

heights of the reigns of the great early sultans like Mehmed the Conqueror (1451–1481) and Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566). Selim III fell victim to reaction and was overthrown in 1807, but Mahmud II (1808–1839) carried on, and with the destruction of the Janissaries in 1826 ushered in a half-century of reform known as the *Tanzimat*, or renovation era.<sup>6</sup> Though Mahmud vacillated in his zeal for reform; and Sultans Abdülmejid (1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (1861–1876) were sometimes reformist, sometimes conservative, and often capricious, attempts at reform continued with few interruptions until Abdülhamid II ended them in 1877 by suspending the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 and reverting to despotic rule.

Those most responsible for implementing the reforms, by cooperating with the sultan as well as by pressuring him for more and faster reform, were a small group of unusually capable members of the Ottoman civil bureaucracy. Four men in particular used the office of grand vizier (analogous to prime minister) to initiate and implement almost all the major reforms. Reshid Pasha composed the first broad reformist declaration known as the Rescript of the Rose Chamber in 1839, introduced numerous administrative reforms and experiments, and was the first to press the idea of equal treatment of non-Muslims as a key to increased political stability. The duumvirate of Fuad and Ali Pashas, who controlled Ottoman affairs from about 1856 to 1871, sought to make fundamental reforms in provincial administration and in the fields of law and education, as well as considerably strengthening the empire's foreign position. Midhat Pasha, the empire's ablest administrator, succeeded in reform under the most adverse circumstances and later was the chief promoter of the constitutional movement of 1876.

Finally, on the fringes of the actual reform administration was a group known as the Young Ottomans (Şerif Mardin refers to them as the "bureaucratic intelligentsia").<sup>7</sup> These were men trained as bureaucrats, but who spent most of the Tanzimat period

<sup>6</sup> The Janissaries, once an elite military force in the personal service of the sultan, had become ascriptive, lazy, and politically extremely reactionary by the 19th century.

<sup>7</sup> Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1962).

either in exile because they were too radical for the sultan to tolerate, or out of administrative office because they preferred to work as writers, journalists, or publicists. Though intellectually outstanding and greatly gifted in the literary arts, their limited administrative experience and sometimes limited appreciation of political problems made them poor critics or reformers. They did, however, agitate politically and propagandize reform ideas, activities which usefully supplemented the work of the administrators, and their continued criticism kept a spark lighted in the despotic period after 1877.

In the discussion of the Ottoman bureaucracy that follows, first the changes in the internal state of the bureaucracy are examined in relation to the competence of personnel and the rationalization of the organizational and decision-making structures. Second, an attempt is made to relate findings on the state of the bureaucracy to the ideas and administrative practices through which the reformers sought to achieve stability and change.

### POSITION OF BUREAUCRATS IN OTTOMAN SOCIETY

It is not surprising that many of the leaders of reform sprang from the Ottoman bureaucracy. This was related to the historical relationship between Ottoman administrative and political power, the experiences of Ottoman bureaucrats with the West, and the absence of other reformist elements in the social structure of the empire.

The military group and the ecclesiastics (*ulema*) had independent bases of power: the military in their numbers and weapons, the ecclesiastics as interpreters of Islamic law. Strict controls over recruitment and inheritance of property had kept the bureaucracy little more than an arm of the sultan, however. Throughout the history of the Ottoman state, the bureaucracy enjoyed power and high status during periods of strong, equitable, and centralized administration, but was eclipsed by centrifugal forces when weak sultans reigned in Istanbul. The bureaucracy was at the height of its power during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent, who on his accession "became master of a perfect machine of absolutist government, over an empire stretching from Hungary to the bor-

ders of Persia, from the Black Sea to the Indian Ocean.”<sup>8</sup> His succession by a line of weak sultans eroded the power of the bureaucracy. Under the weak sultans, the bureaucracy was affected by a decline in quality of personnel because of less rigorous selection of students for the Palace School, and by the growth of hereditary local notable families which were quick to decentralize power.

The power of the bureaucracy period increased again in the *Tanzimat* when Mahmud II undertook to make it his agency of reform by weakening rival power groups and reforming the bureaucracy itself. The Janissaries were disbanded in 1826. The powers of the *ulema* were gradually reduced by the introduction of secular law codes and courts by the beginnings of secularization of education, and by measures toward bureaucratization such as making the *Sheyhulislam*<sup>9</sup> an officer of the government and creating a separate government department for control of pious foundations.<sup>10</sup> Subjugation of provincial notables (*ayans*) frequently was attempted by military force, but not always very successfully, especially when newly powerful bureaucrats began to exploit their own power and to enable the *ayan* to “appear to the passive local population in the guise of protectors against oppressive governors and an arbitrary central authority.”<sup>11</sup> Bureaucrats tended to be reformers, therefore, because reform furthered centralization, which increased the strength of the bureaucracy.

Furthermore the bureaucrats had been the most thoroughly exposed to contact with Europe, the Ottomans’ chief rival and the eventual source of reform ideas. Ever since the Ottomans had inaugurated regular diplomatic relations in the 17th century, bureaucrats had served in European capitals and become exposed to the industrial, political, social, and economic revolution in the West, eventually including such ideas as popular sovereignty and parliamentary government. By the 19th century it had become Ottoman practice to copy one western institution after another,

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford, 1961), p. 439.

<sup>9</sup> The head of the Islamic hierarchy of the empire.

<sup>10</sup> On these developments see Mardin, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Halil Inalcik, “The Nature of Traditional Society in Turkey,” in R. E. Ward and D. A. Rustow (eds.), *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1964), p. 54.



so that knowledge of western languages and acquaintance with Europe became an important *de facto* qualification for high bureaucratic office. But the bureaucrats did not understand the societal context in which European modernization was effective, and thus were not able to apply the modifications with discernment to Ottoman society.

Finally, the bureaucrats were almost the only group that could give rise to reformers. Most of the economic and social groups that might have had the strongest interests in reform (e.g. the commercial class, industrial interests, the free professions) were non-Muslim minorities, who were not particularly interested in strengthening the position of the Ottoman dynasty. The Greeks, for instance, who controlled much of Istanbul's commercial activity, had strong separatist ambitions. The separatist ambitions of the Jews and Armenians were weaker, and they might more readily have supported reforms that might have maintained the empire, but they were considered second-class citizens with ultimately little access to sources of power that the reformers might have been able to use. The Ottomans themselves remained aloof from commercial pursuits as a demeaning activity.

Although some bureaucrats did become reformist, the question remains as to why the bureaucracy produced so *few* reformers. It can be hypothesized that the bureaucracy, in their close social ties with the sultanate, became conservative when they gained power. Also, perhaps the importance of the occupational divisions mentioned above was not only that reform was left to the bureaucrats by default, but that the minorities actively resisted reform so as not to have their positions disturbed, and since the Ottomans had little interest in economic development, this combination of circumstances resulted in the reformers stopping at inadequate measures.

## INTERNAL STATE OF THE BUREAUCRACY

The changes introduced into the internal structure of the Ottoman bureaucracy in the *Tanzimat* period did not lead to the improvement that might have been attained in a different setting. Job security led to inertia rather than activity. Professionalization and specialization produced fragmentation of functions, and legal-



ists rather than generalists. Rationalization of authority reduced rather than increased willingness to take responsibility for action. Further research may usefully be directed at the task of trying to specify the conditions under which these changes bring about bureaucratic effectiveness.<sup>12</sup> Only two aspects of bureaucratic effectiveness are discussed here: competence of personnel, and rationalization of organization and authority.

### *Competence of personnel*

A major obstacle to recruiting competent personnel was the ascription characteristic of the Ottoman social structure. The administrative structure was divided into three career lines: military, ecclesiastic, and bureaucratic. Each had its own training procedures, which it controlled rather strictly. The famous *devshirme* system of rigorous merit selection for military and administrative posts broke down not long after the reign of Suleyman, and there arose "a tendency, already discernible in the early seventeenth century and becoming wholly apparent in the eighteenth, for careers if not offices to become hereditary. It would appear to have been unusual and rather difficult for a son to enter a career other than that of his father, so that each [of the bureaucratic, military and ecclesiastical institutions] was largely self-perpetuating although not necessarily closed to newcomers."<sup>13</sup>

The basic qualification for appointment to the bureaucracy was literacy, which long remained a monopoly for a small elite, despite the eventual expansion of educational opportunities to most of the cities of the empire. After this came the requirements to "serve the state, the faith, and be in the 'Ottoman way.'" The "Ottoman way" meant strong loyalty to the dynasty, living within

<sup>12</sup> The applicability of one of the most popular definitions of modern bureaucracy (the ideal type of Max Weber) to the developing areas has recently been seriously questioned, and it has even been suggested that the Weberian ideals may be dysfunctional in such areas. Several authors in a recent volume have "come close to stating that corruption or its functional equivalent may be critically important to the developing nations," and seem to think that "classical bureaucracy is not necessarily a precondition to development." Cf. LaPalombara, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Richard L. Chambers, "The Civil Bureaucracy and Political Modernization in Turkey," in Ward and Rustow, *op. cit.*, p. 303. He also notes that there was little movement even between bureaus within the bureaucracy itself.

Ottoman culture, and sharing a set of attitudes and values which "made them in their own esteem the only persons in the empire deserving the name of Ottoman"<sup>14</sup> and fit to govern. Eighteenth-century training has been described as consisting of formal schooling, on-the-job training, and "acculturation into the Ottoman way" through such channels as lectures by leading *ulema*.<sup>15</sup>

The control of the bureaucracy over its members was facilitated in that advancement both to higher administrative and to policy-making positions and appears usually to have been from within the bureaucracy itself. Although this meant some useful professionalization of the higher ranks of the bureaucracy, most observers and students of Ottoman affairs agree that patronage was a far more important criterion for advancement than was merit. Officials, particularly at the higher levels, often rose and fell rapidly, and lower-ranking men usually attached themselves to the most promising candidate for high office who would then install his followers in key posts. This made a bureaucratic career a rather insecure one to which a good man might hesitate to commit himself.

One attempt at reform was to try to increase the social status of the bureaucracy and the job security of its members by measures such as uniforms for bureaucrats as distinctive as those of the military and *ulema*; new tables of rank, precedence, and titles; revising the salary scale, and attaching salaries to positions rather than individuals; and eliminating one-year appointments for higher positions. Unfortunately nothing more specific is known, such as the level of salaries, and of course the degree of adherence to the regulations, that would make it possible to evaluate the adequacy of these measures. Scholars agree, however, that the effects of these measures were unsatisfactory, and that they even tended to have results opposite to those intended. One recent writer has observed that "[Giving] the office-holders a security of tenure approaching immunity to dismissal . . . [while] designed to improve morale and

<sup>14</sup> Peter F. Sugar, "Economic and Political Modernization in Turkey," in Ward and Rustow, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Itzkowitz, *Mehmed Raghib Pasha, The Making of an Ottoman Grand Vizier* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Oriental Studies, Princeton Univ., 1959, unpublished), pp. 35-37.

efficiency in the service . . . in fact enhanced the security of office-holders more than their efficiency.”<sup>16</sup>

Another reform reinforced hereditary recruitment even more. In 1839, Mahmud ended the tradition of sequestrating the fortunes of high ranking bureaucrats and returning their funds to the treasury at their death.

Instead of attracting to the service men who had previously been unwilling to serve because it might mean sacrificing the fortune one could expect to leave one's family were one to follow other career lines, the reform enabled “the sons of lucky beneficiaries [to command] privileges which put them ahead of other employees of the state.”<sup>17</sup> Thus the distance between those relying on ascription and those seeking to focus on achievement as the basis for advancement became greater than ever.

A more successful reform was the establishment of new, more “Western,” and thus, in Ottoman terms, more “modern” schools for bureaucrats, such as the *Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye* in 1839 and the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* (Civil Service School) in 1859. Benefits from these schools did not accrue until after the *Tanzimat* period, however.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most noteworthy “school” was a government department established to break monopoly which Phanariote Greeks had on positions as interpreters, key points of contact between the Ottoman government and the West. The Translation Office (*Tercüme Odası*), opened in 1833 provided its employees with special training in French, history, arithmetic, and other non-traditional subjects, as well as systematic and concentrated contact with the West. Almost all the reform bureaucrats and Young Ottomans were “graduates” of this department.

In relation to the central problem of combating nationalism and European imperialism, then, the measures which the government took to improve the competence of its bureaucrats were largely fruitless. The bureaucrats continued to regard their own interest ahead of the public interest, and reforms which in different contexts might have led to a more effective bureaucracy led

<sup>16</sup> Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 305; Cf. also Mardin, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–151.

<sup>17</sup> Franz von Werner, *Türkische Skizzen* (Leipzig, 1878), cited in Mardin, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> Mardin, *op. cit.*, p. 208; Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 368.

in traditional Ottoman society only to further deepening of the hold of ascription. The bureaucracy did remain an attractive career for some exceptionally able men like the *Tanzimat* reformers, but in no greater numbers than before.

### *Rationalization of Organization and Authority*

The Ottoman bureaucracy needed rationalization of organization and authority for its role in revitalizing the empire. What was needed was a rational division of functions within the bureaucracy, and mechanisms both to enable the Grand Vizier to enforce compliance with official policies and to improve coordination and policy planning.

Organizationally, the problem was that over several centuries, bureaus and subbureaus had been created haphazardly when a new territory was added to the empire or a new function assumed by the administration. At the beginning of the *Tanzimat* period, there was a confusion of ill-defined, overlapping jurisdictions: bureaus with duties which the administration no longer performed or jurisdiction over domains which the Istanbul government no longer controlled. Procedurally, it has been calculated that a petition presented to the finance administration had to pass through at least twenty-two formal steps before action was taken.<sup>19</sup> Reorganization of functions appears to have been relatively easy, because it touched the basic distribution of power only peripherally. Late in the 19th century, there was a series of specialized ministries rather than large, conglomerate bureaus.<sup>20</sup>

Hierarchy and distribution of authority, however, was much less easily achieved because power in the Ottoman system was to a large extent a function of personal influence with the sultan, and the Grand Vizier had many shrewd competitors in various high administrative positions and in the sultan's large personal retinue and palace establishment.<sup>21</sup> A council of ministers and more specialized bodies like the Council of Judicial Ordinances and councils for public instruction and military affairs were introduced,

<sup>19</sup> Itzkowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–74. Cf. also H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: Oxford, 1950–1957) Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95, 365–367.

<sup>21</sup> Gibb and Bowen, *op. cit.*, *passim* pp. 76–126; Itzkowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–156.

but they were coordinative rather than policy making, and functioned well only when powerful personalities chose to use them—a relatively rare situation.<sup>22</sup> Authority relationships might have been improved by reducing the power of bureaucrats within the hierarchy to appeal to outside political forces and undermine their superiors. Instead of giving the Grand Vizier added powers of appointment and dismissal, however, the sultans strengthened their own control over appointments and re-asserted the doctrine that all government employees were in fact personal servants of the sultan. As a result, the effectiveness of reform administrators was often nullified by official and private interests able to insert their influence at numerous levels of the bureaucracy. Conservative sultans like Abdülaziz made a practice of shifting governors and ministers capriciously and frequently, becoming restrained only at times of grave foreign crises.<sup>23</sup> Only in the 1876 constitution did the Grand Vizier receive at least a formal voice in appointments, not really getting control over them until after the Young Turk revolt of 1908. In improving the internal authority relationships of the bureaucracy, the reformers did not even get as far in putting the changes into effect as they had done in some of the measures to improve the caliber of personnel.

### REFORM PROJECTS

The reformist bureaucrats sought (1) to substitute Ottomanism as an ideology to counter nationalism; (2) the reform of provincial administration; and (3) an Ottoman constitution.

#### *Ottomanism*

When Ottoman statesmen realized that Western military superiority was related to Western training and technology, they began (in the 18th century) to import foreign military equipment, techniques, and instructors. When in the 19th century Ottoman bureaucrats acquainted with the West realized the relation between Western political strength and organization on the basis of nation-states, and nationalism and separatism in the Balkan provinces of

<sup>22</sup> Mardin, *op. cit.*, p. 152; Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856–1876* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1963), p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> For some vivid illustrations see Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

the empire, they sought to counter nationalism with an equally attractive ideology. This was the concept of Ottomanism, or identification with the empire on the part of all its subjects. The appeal of Ottomanism was to rest on reforms granting full *de jure* and *de facto* equality to the non-Muslim subjects of the empire, and on greatly improved public administration in the provinces.

Basic to Ottomanism as a counter to Balkan nationalism was the abolition of legal discrimination against non-Muslims. In 1839, early in the *Tanzimat* period, the reformist Grand Vizier Reshid Pasha persuaded Sultan Abdülmecid to include several provisions toward this end in the Rescript of the Rose Chamber. "The hope was . . . that such general guarantees of equal protection under law would strengthen the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire by increasing the loyalty of its subjects, Christian as well as Muslim, and by diminishing separatist tendencies."<sup>24</sup> Specific reforms which were outlined included secularization of laws other than those related to personal status, secularization of education, opening government employment and military service to non-Muslims, and revisions in the tax structure.

On the formal level, there was notable progress along many of these lines during the *Tanzimat* period. In the legal field, accomplishments included promulgation of secular commercial, penal, and land codes, establishment of mixed tribunals in these fields, an entirely new civil code (the *Mejelle*) in 1869, and the secularization of the judiciary under a Ministry of Justice supported by training institutions for judges and lawyers. In education, facilities were significantly expanded, and restrictions against non-Muslims in all schools were abolished. In taxation, in 1855 the government removed the two most discriminatory levies, the poll tax "which had been demanded from the protected non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state since the beginnings of Islamic government," and the military exemption tax, which non-Muslims were required to pay in lieu of serving in the armed forces, from which they were barred in any case.<sup>25</sup> In government employment, no significant advances were made.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

But these efforts were highly utopian. From the Muslim side, as Bernard Lewis has noted, the tolerance of non-Muslims was deeply embedded in the laws and traditions of Islam and of the Ottoman system, "predicated on the assumption that the tolerated communities were separate and inferior."<sup>26</sup> From the Christian side there was also great resistance, for the millet system of Ottoman rule had long given non-Muslim communities and their leaders much autonomy and temporal power, which was buttressed by their longstanding domination of commercial activity and later by the protection of European powers.<sup>27</sup>

Ottomanism as a concept probably never had a real chance of successfully competing with nationalism anyway, and to these important ideological and practical obstacles was added the widely held assumption that the government was unlikely to be willing and/or able to make the reforms a reality. This assumption was borne out, and the inadequate bureaucracy led to even those reforms which *were* inaugurated less than wholly successful.

### *Reform of Provincial Administration*

A "constant dilemma in the *Tanzimat* period was how to maintain centralized control over the far-flung empire while allowing sufficient latitude and authority to local officials so that administration might be efficient and expeditious."<sup>28</sup> Centralization was considered desirable for two reasons: (1) central government-sponsored reform would halt exploitation of the population by local landowners and demonstrate some benefits of remaining

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 43, cites an incident where "a Muslim, hailed to the police station by a Christian for having insulted the latter with the epithet *gavur* (infidel), was told by the police captain: 'O my son, didn't we explain? Now there is the Tanzimat; a *gavur* is no longer a *gavur*.'"

<sup>27</sup> The millet system was one under which the various religious communities applied their own laws to matters of personal status, and in these were self-administering. Cf. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 328 ff., and Davison, *op. cit.*, chap. iv. The most vivid illustration of the lack of appeal of equal treatment was the military exemption tax. It had long been Ottoman law that non-Muslims were unfit for military service and that they should pay a special tax as a penalty. When this discrimination formally ended, however, it was discovered that the great majority of Christians preferred to continue paying the tax rather than serving.

<sup>28</sup> Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 136.



under Ottoman protection; (2) re-establishment of central control would increase government revenues. Decentralization, on the other hand, might appease the nationalist separatists, and would be a step in the direction of earlier and relatively fruitful practice of allowing subject peoples to keep their own culture and institutions as long as they paid taxes and refrained from armed rebellions.

Provincial administration, like other aspects of Ottoman government, had deteriorated from what earlier had been one of great efficiency. Some steps toward reform were taken early in the *Tanzimat* period under Sultan Mahmud II. Military sorties against *ayans* were partly effective. The promise of the Rescript of the Rose Chamber to abolish tax farming was fulfilled in 1840, though the drastic drop in revenues caused it to be reintroduced within two years.<sup>29</sup> Reshid Pasha experimented with granting different degrees of authority to governors according to the needs of individual provinces, and inaugurated some local councils. These later inspired the most comprehensive single effort, the *Vilayet* (Province) law of 1864, which sought to make provincial administration both stronger and more equitable.

In some ways the *Vilayet* law was modeled closely after the French *Prefet* system. Province boundaries were redrawn to make larger units, and each was subdivided hierarchically into *sanjaks*, *kazas*, *nahiyes*, communes, and villages. The governor's office was reorganized into departments of civil, financial, police, political, and legal affairs. The governor was given authority over all officials in the province, though this authority seems to have been somewhat blurred by the sultan's power to appoint *sanjak* and *kaza* officials, and by the responsibility which various heads of departments had to their respective ministries in addition to their responsibilities to the governor.<sup>30</sup> In order to bring the government closer to the people and to bridge religious divisions, the executive structure was supplemented by a system of mixed courts and general assemblies, and administrative councils at province, *sanjak*, and *kaza* levels, consisting of varying combinations of officials,

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147; Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-382.

heads of religious communities, and "representatives of the population."<sup>31</sup>

The reforms actually achieved on the basis of the *Vilayet* law were minimal, however, because neither the executive reorganization nor the council system were effective. The law was actually implemented with notable success only twice, both times primarily because of the work of an unusually capable bureaucrat, Midhat Pasha. Known as the ablest administrator of the Empire, he was appointed in 1864 to govern a model province, the Tuna, or Danube province, a rather large area including the region of Sofia. His main assets were his imaginativeness and the power to select and secure some capable subordinates. Davison notes that Midhat seems to have been able to influence the selection of those appointed from Istanbul.<sup>32</sup> In most instances, however, bureaucrats were not eager to go off into remote areas, nor were they trained to deal with problems totally different from their work in the offices of the capital. The few effective administrators who did get to the provinces were rapidly submerged in political intrigues, sometimes to the point where there were even demands that power be restored to the local notables. These at least had roots in the provinces rather than being transferable at the caprice of the sultan, and thus were interested in maintaining some stability and prosperity.

The system of councils was not very effective because the government was never really able to achieve representative institutions. There was no question, of course, of direct representation, for which few would have been prepared anyway, but by means of a complicated and very restricted system of election, members of administrative councils were in effect named by the Porte. In some cases this might have been justifiable, as some provincial councils with which Rashid Pasha had experimented in the 1840's had been extremely corrupt, but the new system did little more than substitute one unrepresentative institution for another. The councils seem usually to have been vehicles either for dominance by the governor, or for dominance of unrepresentative local elites; or used concurrently by both to cover up misdeeds or to confirm on

<sup>31</sup> Davison, *op cit.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

paper what was not so in fact, providing “an arrangement [which] often succeeded only in impeding efficient administration, and it became fashionable for governors to say that ‘their hands were tied by the *Tanzimat*.’ ”<sup>33</sup>

Under these circumstances the success of Midhat Pasha in the Danube province, repeated five years later in the much more difficult Baghdad area, was extraordinary. On the one hand, it showed the importance of exceptional individuals. Within two years Midhat had “restored order, introduced a new hierarchy, provided agricultural credits, extended roads, bridges, and waterways, started industries, opened schools and orphanages, founded a newspaper, and increased the revenues of the province from 26,000 to 300,000 purses.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, his short-lived tenure (three years in each place) revealed anew serious political and administrative problems. The shortage also of competent lower-level and middle-level administrators added to the circumstances enabling subversion of reform administration by provincial as well as Istanbul traditionalists. Unfortunately, only the most minimal data are available about the functioning of the bureaucracy in the provinces. It is not possible to say, for instance, whether the administrative experiments had different effects in Muslim and non-Muslim provinces, an appraisal which would have to be made before one can come to firmer conclusions on questions such as the degree to which reform was hopeless in such places as the Balkan provinces, which were bent on separatism.

### *The Ottoman Constitution*

All through the *Tanzimat* period, the reformist bureaucrats were concerned with the problem of limiting autocracy. Probably the greatest political conflict was over the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. The reformers led by Midhat Pasha succeeded in having it promulgated, but their victory lasted only a year before Sultan Abdülhamid suspended the charter, which was not restored until the Young Turk revolt of 1908.

Attempts at institutionalizing limits on autocracy had been made

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137. There was also the use of inspectors sent out at intervals from Istanbul, who apparently were effective in curbing the worst excesses. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

earlier in the *Tanzimat* period, when the reformist bureaucrats sought to make the Imperial Rescripts of 1839 and 1856 as binding as possible on the sultan, without notable success. More formal constitutions had been used in the reorganization of some of the non-Muslim *millet*s, and had also been tried in the reform of provincial administration. Formal limitation of the authority of the sultan, however, was a far more momentous step. There was great disagreement on it among the reformers, which reflected their range of experience in relating politics to administration.

Ali and Fuad Pashas, the most experienced in dealing with political and administrative problems involving the empire as a whole, were strongly against the project, maintaining that the many nationalities could never work together and that "the majority of the population was totally unfit to decide its own fate."<sup>35</sup> They advocated imposing reform from the top. Midhat Pasha's largely administrative outlook coupled with political naivete made him more optimistic, to the point of seeing panaceas in many of the mechanics of parliamentary institutions.<sup>36</sup> The Young Ottomans, furthest removed from both political and administrative experience, insisted on making the limitation of sultanic power into a major principle. They carried the principle so far, in fact, as to oppose all unchecked authority, including that of the reformist grand viziers themselves, being particularly incensed at the great strength of Ali and Fuad Pashas.

But all the reformers remained basically Ottomans and remained entangled in the basic paradoxes which made their pursuit of constitutionalism ultimately devoid of real meaning. The Young Ottomans, who stood most strongly for reform, were also the most strongly insistent that the empire must continue to rest on Islam. They insisted that Islam contained all the necessary bases not only for democracy but also for justice, civilization, and progress but failed to note that these ideals had been only rarely carried into practice. The Young Ottomans were also the chief proponents for the sultan to remain the leader of the governmental system, offering a variety of formulas by which the Sultan might "hand down" the constitution, or that the sultan could be looked on as "responsi-

<sup>35</sup> Mardin, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

ble for his own actions" and therefore at least partly outside the constitutional framework.<sup>37</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that the sultan found it not too difficult to see to it that the constitution he promulgated gave him a continued predominance of power. No powers were specifically denied him, and a great many specifically granted.<sup>38</sup> Scarcely a year after the promulgation of the constitution, Sultan Abdülhamid used his powers under Article 113 to declare Midhat Pasha a dangerous person, exile him and other reformers, and dissolve the parliament, which did not meet again for thirty-one years.

The failure of the Ottoman constitution, like other reform projects, reflected the inadequacies of the reformers: the disunity among the bureaucrats; their inadequate appreciation of politics; their failure to reform the bureaucracy; and their limited understanding of how and why constitutions worked in the West, and what Westernization really involved.

## CONCLUSION

The failure of reform in the Ottoman Empire was by no means total. In the *Tanzimat* era, there were improvements in education and in the administration of justice, scattered progress in reforming provincial government and the treatment of non-Muslims, and at least some sort of representative institutions for many groups in the empire. All of these were important building blocks for the modernization of Turkey in the 20th century. And although the reformers failed to repulse imperialism and overcome nationalist separatism, they did succeed in postponing the actual end of the empire for a full century after most observers had predicted it.

The Ottoman case is useful, however, in focusing on some problems of the role of traditional institutions in directed political change. An effort has been made to demonstrate that modernization differs radically from reform (the latter being a rearrangement of the societal structure without basic changes in the assumptions on which the political system rests), and that when reform is offered in a situation which requires modernization (a fundamental re-

<sup>37</sup> Mardin, *op. cit.*, pp. 312, 375–376.

<sup>38</sup> For a complete listing see Davison, *op. cit.*, pp. 386–387.

orientation of the society), traditional practices may become even more deeply entrenched than before. In the Ottoman case, modernization sufficient to meet the threats of nationalism and imperialism probably required abandonment of the Islamic state and absolute monarchy. Insistence on retaining them was closely related to failure to develop a bureaucracy which was adequate for the task of revitalizing the empire, although it was much less traditional at the end of the *Tanzimat* period than at its beginning. The failure of the bureaucracy led, in turn, to the failure of various reform projects. Insufficient political commitment to changing the society led to bureaucratic behavior inconsistent with modernization.

It is, of course, impossible, on the basis of a single case, especially one about which there is so little data, to do more than suggest the most tentative of hypotheses. The relationships between political goals and the modernization both of specific institutions such as bureaucracies, and of societies as a whole, deserve greater exploration. But the Ottoman case seems to support Manfred Halpern's assertion that "Before bureaucracies in the Middle East can play useful roles in the modernization of their society, there must be enterprising and enduring politicians."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 1963), p. 348.