

The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement: Nationalism, Protest and the Working Classes in the Formation of Modern Turkey

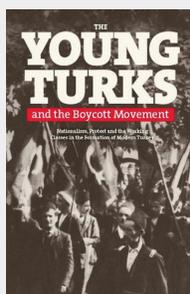
By Y. Doğan Çetinkaya

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014, 320 pages, \$95.00, ISBN: 9781780764726.

Reviewed by Klara Volarie

THE YOUNG TURKS and the Boycott Movement of Y. Doğan Çetinkaya represents valuable insight into three boycott movements that took place during the Second constitutional period. The author places them in the mass politics context, which started with the CUP period when society, unlike previous periods, became more actively involved in politics. One of the consequences of this involvement were the three boycott movements: the first in 1908 as the result of Austria-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the second during 1910-11 following the outburst of the Cretan question, and the third in 1913-14 again as the outcome of the circumstances immediately following the Balkan Wars. All of these boycott movements were separately discussed in the book's chapters.

According to Çetinkaya, the book has two main goals. The first goal is to show that the Young Turks and CUP did not start the boycott movements, but boycotts were rather the consequence of the spontaneous public meetings where Ottoman citizens expressed their attitude toward current political and social issues. The second goal of the book was to point out that Turkish nationalism, in this period, was not just a current of thought, but had vivid social dimensions, which was expressed especially in the last boycott movement. Thus, the intention of the book is to fill the gap or better yet to change the mainstream



perception in Turkish historiography about the role of the CUP in the boycott movements and the nature of these movements, which I believe the author successfully carried out.

The first chapter of the book, therefore, begins with the overview of Turkish historiography that dealt with the non-Muslim and Muslim bourgeoisie, working classes, and the state in this period. I consider this chapter as a sort of introduction to the late Ottoman state and society because the described context was quite sketchy; it posed the main, traditional questions, like could we speak about the Muslim bourgeoisie? In other words, this chapter draws from the mainstream topics that preoccupy Turkish historiography. Because this book was written in English and is therefore aimed at non-Turkish audiences as well, I expected that Çetinkaya would refer more to other historiographies, particularly Greek historiography. The author obviously possesses certain Greek language skills, but he did not seem to use them as thoroughly as he could have. After all, the Ottoman Empire at that time was a multi-ethnic Empire, so the voices of some other historiographies, especially the Greek one, on the same topic would be helpful.

As mentioned, in the three chapters that follow the historiographical part, Çetinkaya discusses boycott movements. The first boycott movement in 1908 was directed against Aus-

trian goods. The boycott started with spontaneous meetings, but the whole movement was eventually organized and directed by the Boycott Society. Port workers and merchants played a crucial role in this boycott. The second boycott movement arose from the Cretan incident in 1910 when Muslim deputies in Crete refused to profess the oath to the Greek king. This caused a great scandal in the Ottoman Empire, which again resulted in public demonstrations. As Çetinkaya points out, the Boycott Society this time conducted a boycott against Greek goods, which was indirectly aimed against the Ottoman Greeks and foreign citizens, who were mistakenly taken to be citizens and entrepreneurs from the Greek state. Similarly as in the first boycott movement, the state was put under international pressure, so, it forced movement to come to an end. The third boycott movement could be seen as a direct consequence not just of the Balkan Wars and Muslim migrants coming from the Balkans, but also as the result of the first two movements where the necessity to create a Muslim/Turkish national economy (*Milli İktisat*) and a need to buy domestic products was repeatedly mentioned and enforced during the period of the boycotts. This time, the boycott started with pamphlets directed against non-Muslims in the Empire and was conducted not by the port workers but by the street bands consisted of Muslim refugees. Unlike the first two boycotts, it was extremely violent and it entered well into First World War.

These three chapters are full of vivid and useful examples that describe the complexity of the boycott movement; however, this plethora of facts hindered a deeper analysis. Çetinkaya

excellently brings forward the attitude and reluctant stance of the state toward these movements and directs the reader's attention to the problems in the Ottoman administration. Although he demonstrates the personal interests and preferences of the direct participants in the boycott, for example: port workers and merchants, he nevertheless leaves out other important links such as– the Ottoman society's inter-communal relations. Çetinkaya almost constantly refers to the boycott against non-Muslims but –in fact– he only provides the reader with examples and analysis concerning the Greeks/Ottoman Greeks. Other communities like the Bulgarians, Armenians, and Jews are passingly mentioned and thus, we do not exactly know to what extent were they affected by the boycotts and even more importantly, what was their stance toward it? For instance, it was said in the very conclusion that the Jewish community in Salonica was, among other actors, “blamed for being the ultimate instigators of the movement” (page 226). Therefore, it is difficult to refer to this movement, as against non-Muslims, when obviously the situation was much more complex. Another subject that also needed further analysis was a direct comparison of the three boycotts and the nature of the Ottoman press which Çetinkaya extensively uses. Although the author excellently points out the important role of the press in the whole process, he did not touch the nature of the press itself – its connections with the state, the censorship that was put in place after 1909, and personal interests etc. which could affect their reports. But, as stated above, despite these shortcomings, the book is very good and should be part of investigating state-society relations during the Young Turk period.