

The Rise of the Young Turks

By the 1890s it was not just minorities within the Ottoman Empire who were calling for change and in some cases revolution. Christians, Muslims, and Jews were now joined by Turks and even members of the nobility—including the sultan's nephew, Prince Sabaheddin.

At his home in Paris, the prince hosted a wide range of Ottoman dissidents in February of 1902 as the Congress of Ottoman Liberals, one of these groups was known as **The Young Turks**. At the conference, 47 delegates, representing Turkish, Arab, Greek, Kurdish, Armenian, and Jewish groups, formed an alliance against the sultan. Together the groups called for equal rights for all Ottoman citizens, self-administration for minorities, and restoration of the suspended Ottoman constitution.

In 1907 the prince, with the support of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, organized the second Congress of Ottoman Liberals. At the meeting representatives, especially from the Young Turk movement, called for immediate overthrow of the sultan.

While the prince was busy organizing groups in order to plan the revolutionary coup, the Committee of Union and Progress (a branch of the Young Turk movement) went public with their plan to overthrow the Sultan. As they traveled from town to town, the mutiny picked up public support. Without sufficient troops to put down the uprising, the sultan gave in to the demands of the Committee of Union and Progress on July 24, 1908. The Young Turk revolution was greeted with broad support. Newspapers reported scenes of Christians, Jews, and Muslims embracing in the streets.



A crowd of Armenians celebrating the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.

The Young Turks in Power

In 1908, the Young Turk revolution brought great hope for many people living in the Ottoman Empire.

The reintroduction of the constitution, with its promises of equal rights, seemed

to offer opportunities to people who had been left behind in the old system. The Young Turk vision of a strong central government promised an alternative to the corruption and disorder of the sultan's regime. Many hoped the violence that had come to characterize the sultan's reign would now end.

Problems Unresolved

Even though the Sultan had been overthrown, the issues within the Ottoman Empire did not go away overnight. There were tensions within the Young Turk movement as well. Between 1908 and 1913, the diversity of opinion within the Young Turk movement became clear. Although one branch of the movement worked with Armenians and others, another branch of the party, favoring Turkish nationalism, began to gain influence. This branch was known as **The Committee for Union and Progress**. Others within the movement were less consumed by ideology than with the practical concerns of holding on to power. Internal unrest and further loss of territory intensified the divide.

Yet another Coup

In 1913, Mehmed Talaat, Ahmed Djemal, and Ismail Enver organized a military coup led by members of the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), and formed a new government. The CUP was a coalition of ultranationalists who believed that the only way to hold on to the empire was embrace a radical idea of ethnic cleansing.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who were the Young Turks?
2. What is the difference between the Young Turks and the Committee for Union and Progress?
3. Who are the three Pashas?
4. What did the CUP believe was the only way to save the crumbling Ottoman empire?