

# DOCUMENTS 5

## LETTER BY THE TURKISH PARIAMENTARIANS TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND HOUSE OF LORDS

13 April 2005

Honorable Members of the British House of Commons and House of Lords:

We, the Members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, express our highest compliments and submit for your consideration a matter of great concern to the people of Turkey and people of Turkish heritage worldwide, regarding the Ottoman-Armenian Tragedy of 1915.

The undersigned members of the Turkish Parliament request that the British Parliament as well as the British Government inform the public that the British Parliament Blue Book Series, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916*, was a propaganda tool of the British War Propaganda Bureau (1914) at “Wellington House” and is an unreliable account of the Ottoman Armenians revolt and the Ottoman Government’s subsequent response.

As you are probably aware, during World War I (hereinafter, “WWI”) the British War Propaganda Bureau (1914), later the Department of Information (1916) and later the Ministry of Information (1918), all referred to as the “Wellington House”<sup>1</sup>, planned and executed a public disinformation campaign aimed against Germany and the Ottoman Empire to ensure support for the war among the citizens of the Allied states, particularly America, and to bring about the participation of America in the war. “Wellington House” produced two significant reports, one regarding “German Atrocities” and the other “Turkish Atrocities” (the latter entitled, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, hereinafter, the “Blue Book”), both of which were drafted by Bureau Resident Expert, Arnold Toynbee<sup>2</sup>, and published under the name of the famed British Ambassador to the United States, Viscount Bryce. On December 2, 1925, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Sir Austen Chamberlain appearing before the House of Lords, declared the Bryce “German Atrocities” report to be factually baseless war

1 M.L.Sanders & Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda During the First World War. 1914-18*, London, 1982

2 Arnold Joseph Toynbee, ed., *The Treatment of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon Secretary for Foreign Affairs, by Viscount Bryce*, London : H. M. Stationery Office, 1916.

3 Sanders & Taylor, pp. 40-41.

propaganda<sup>4</sup>. However, no retraction followed with respect to Bryce's Blue Book, although it suffered from the same defects. Arnold Toynbee himself admitted that the Blue Book was indeed a "war propaganda".<sup>5</sup>

While all of the Bureau's records on the Blue Book were destroyed in a fire, many important records had survived in the archives of other divisions of the British bureaucracy. Recently, independent researchers in the British Archives discovered these records. The records in question prove that<sup>6</sup> :

1. The War Propaganda Bureau determined to portray the destruction of the Ottoman Empire as a major purpose of WWI. The project was dubbed, "The Turk Must Go." (Meaning that the Turks as a nation must be driven out of Europe and Anatolia and sent away to Central Asia). The campaign mainly targeted the American public and aimed to render British colonialism in Anatolia and Mesopotamia palatable, provide cover for Russian anti-Semitic violence, as Russia was an important ally, and ultimately cause sufficient public outrage in the United States to induce Washington to enter the war.

2. Prime Minister Lloyd George ordered the Director of Information Services, Colonel John Buchan, to design and execute "The Turk Must Go" program<sup>7</sup>. Buchan appointed Stephen Gaselee, a Foreign Office official, to facilitate the production, publication and dissemination of material aimed to create and reinforce<sup>8</sup> : (1) popular affinity between the West and the pre-Turkish ancient heritage of Anatolia and Mesopotamia; (2) a belief that Turks prevented progress, commerce and social development in the region; (3) a conviction that Turkish society is incapable of integrating the Ottoman States' constituent peoples, particularly Armenians, in an equitable manner; (4) a belief that Turkish people, by their nature, are incapable of reform and civil self-government; (5) an understanding that a reactionary and incompetent nation, as Prime Minister Lloyd George had determined the Turkish nation to be, could not be permitted to control the land bridge between Europe and Asia, or be permitted to be a satellite of Germany; and, (6) a consensus that toleration in the Ottoman system of permitting each religious community to govern themselves ("a museum of religions," according to Buchan ) did not harmonize with Western systems of majority rule and minority rights.

<sup>4</sup> Hansard, 5th Session, Vol. 188, October 24, 1925

<sup>5</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, First Publication 1972, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> F.O. 394/40/179902, "Documents relating to the treatment of Armenians and Assyrian Christians in the Ottoman Empire: Key to names of places and persons withheld from publication, September 11, 1916.

<sup>7</sup> F.O.395/139/42320, February 24, 1917.

<sup>8</sup> F.O.395/139/64927, "Anti-Turk Propaganda".

3. Stephen Gaselee invited War Propaganda Bureau Resident Expert and historian, Arnold Toynbee, to designate names of possible authors for the anti-Turkish campaign. Toynbee provided a detailed list, including himself, writers like Mark Sykes<sup>9</sup> who had worked on the Middle East, American missionary leaders and other persons who enthusiastically espouse the Armenian cause. The clandestine campaign portrayed selected individuals as private citizens engaging in personal activities to report on the situation of the Armenians, using information devised by the War Propaganda Bureau. While a team of 54 authors wrote information pieces, Sir Gilbert Parker and Geoffrey Butler, who enjoyed excellent access to President Woodrow Wilson and major American newspapers, served as transatlantic operations liaisons and information conduits.

4. The War Propaganda Bureau was the sole source for all information regarding the situation in the Ottoman Empire. The Gaselee-Toynbee team produced over seven million copies of 37 publications, including the Blue Book. Given that Great Britain destroyed the German transatlantic communication cables, the War Propaganda Bureau was able to censor and control reports that were submitted by independent correspondents on the only alternative – the British cables. In 1915, the Associated Press estimated that Britain destroyed 75% of the dispatches of American correspondents in Europe.

5. Ambassador Viscount Bryce's Blue Book purported to be based on 150 eyewitness accounts of massacres and other violence committed by Ottoman soldiers and private citizens against Ottoman Armenians. The Blue Book referred to the "eyewitnesses" by codes, apparently to "protect the persons from reprisals". A War Propaganda Bureau document recently discovered from the British archives containing the code keys made possible the identification of the 150 eyewitnesses, of whom 59 were missionaries, 52 were Armenian activists, 7 were Armenian Dashnak rebel leaders, and the remaining 32 either fictitious or duplicate listings of individuals under different categories.<sup>10</sup> Arnold Toynbee himself was unhappy to work with the statements of unknown authors. Once he wrote to Viscount

9 An article of Mark Sykes that was placed by Wellington House in *The Times* of February 20, 1917 is mentioned here as it is an exemplar of propaganda. In the article "The Turk" was described as a "merciless oppressor", "a remorseless bully", "pure barbarians", "degenerate", "one who has strewn the earth with ruins". In this article just for the sake of humiliating the Turks, the Mongols who have destroyed what is today Iraq were falsely described as Turks. This article was published later as brochure and widely distributed with a letter of Lloyd George. Out of 100,000 copies printed, 32,000 was distributed in the United States. F.O.395/139/51086 and F.O.395/139/47048.

10 F.O.394/40/179902, "Documents relating to the treatment of Armenian and Assyrian Christians in the Ottoman Empire and N. W. Persia: Key to names of places and persons withheld from publication", September 11, 1916. See also the following documents: 10, 13, 23, 77, 79, 85, 91, 102, 103, 104, 108, 110, 111, 112, 114, 116, 117, 120, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 137.

Bryce “I do not know the real authorship of the thirty-four, twenty-three percent of the documents. But these unknown writers appeared in the book, in exactly the same way as the known.”<sup>11</sup>

As it will be seen Bryce’s Blue Book suffers from the same defects that had caused the official British retraction of Bryce’s report regarding “German Atrocities.” As a matter of fact: (1) the Blue Book is the product of the “Turks Must Go” program of the War Propaganda Bureau, consequently it is a propaganda material; (2) the War Propaganda Bureau’s resident experts relied on “eyewitnesses” who did not have personal knowledge of the incidents to which they attested; (3) the authors of the Blue Book did not attempt to corroborate the “eyewitness” accounts by accounts reported by other foreign missions and military officials; (4) other accounts that impeached the “eyewitness” accounts were excluded; (5) the “eyewitnesses” were interested parties and biased by the particular religious and political mandates they were executing; (6) “eyewitness” accounts were cleansed of any mention of the Armenian revolts and massacres of hundred of thousands of Muslims, in Eastern Anatolia; (7) while the Blue Book contains all the condemnations and criticisms heaped on the policies of the Ottoman State by the “eyewitnesses”, it says nothing of the impact of these policies on thousands of Armenians living outside of the war zones, who continued to live in peace and stability, and; (8) Buchan’s work must be seen, at least in part, as a product of his racism and anti-Semitism, which are widely evident in his novels and other writings.

As it will be seen, although the Blue Book represents a masterly propaganda activity of Great Britain during WWI, it is not a reliable historical account of the Ottoman Armenian’s revolt and the Ottoman government’s subsequent response. It is a fraud based on fabrications, half truths and biased reports and perceptions. Indeed there was no mention of Armenian bands joining Russian forces against the Ottoman army, of murders of Ottoman officials, of cutting of Ottoman supply and communication lines, of attempts to capture Ottoman cities, of mass murder of Turks in Van, of the forced migration of more than a million Muslims forced to flee by the Russian and Armenians.<sup>12</sup> Later Toynbee was described as having come to feel that this lopsidedness was a betrayal of historical truth.<sup>13</sup> However, the Blue Book’s destructive and wicked influence is still effective and continues to be used by Armenian activists for deceiving international media,

11 Article by Justin Mc Carthy. “Wellington House and the Turks”

12 Article by Justin Mc Carthy. “Wellington House and the Turks”

13 William H. Mc Neill. *Arnold Toynbee a life.* (Oxford University Press) p.74.

politicians, opinion leaders and academicians and thus propagate feelings of hate and eversion against Turkey.

The British government, though never directly retracting the Blue Book, indirectly impeached the Blue Book through the verdict of the British tribunal set up to prosecute the “Malta prisoners”. As it will be recalled in 1920, 144 Ottoman statesmen and officials accused of charges and atrocities and massacres against Armenians were arrested by the British occupation forces and were exiled to Malta for prosecution. After an exhaustive two-year investigation in the Ottoman, British and American records by an Ottoman Armenian investigator appointed by the tribunal, the Royal Attorney General determined on July 29, 1921, that insufficient evidence existed to proceed with the prosecutions and ordered the release of the “Malta prisoners”.<sup>14</sup>

At this point the following critical questions have to be answered: Why the evidence contained in the Blue Book published in 1916 wasn't used to convict the Turkish deportees to Malta? Though the sources upon which Toynbee had relied in drafting the Blue Book were readily available why were they not taken into consideration by the tribunal?

The answer to these questions is brief and clear: The Blue Book was not used because the assertions and the documents it contained were baseless and unfounded... Although all the sources that Toynbee had relied upon in writing the Blue Book were readily available, they were not used, because these evidences, documents and “eyewitnesses” were deemed unworthy of even attempting to pass admissibility in a British court of law.<sup>15</sup>

British governments continued to discard the Blue Book. In the British House of Lords on 14 April 1999 Foreign Office Minister Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale, on behalf of the British Government, stated that “... but in the absence of unequivocal evidence to show that the Ottoman administration took a specific decision to eliminate the Armenians under their control at the time, British governments have not recognized the events of 1915 and 1916 as “genocide”.

As no corrective action had been taken by the British government similar to

14 E.O. 371/6102/E-5845: L. Olipant (F.O.) to Mr. Woods (Procurator-General's Department) 5445/132/44 of May 31, 1921.

15 E.O. 371/6504/E.8745: Woods (Procurator-General's Department) to the Under Secretary of State for F.O., of July 29, 1921.

the retraction of Bryce' "German Atrocities" report, the Blue Book continues to harm scholarship and research on the Ottoman Armenian case and mobilize hatred against people of Turkish heritage in line with the six "The Turk Must Go" objectives outlined by Colonel Buchan and the War Propaganda Bureau almost one hundred years ago.

The Blue Book continues to serve as a primary source for scholars and policy makers, having been cited thousands of times in works as diverse as textbooks and governmental proclamations in support of the allegation that the Ottoman Armenian experience constitutes the crime of genocide. It portrays the existence of the key element that renders a killing genocide, that is to say the specific intent to kill with express malice. In other words, the Blue Book paints the Ottoman policy, particularly the decision to separate the Ottoman Armenian civilians from the Armenian rebels and Russian army by relocating them out of the war zones, as a facade for racist killing.

The Blue Book continues to reinforce misunderstanding of and hatred against people of Turkish heritage. Colonel Buchan, who created the six objectives of the "The Turk Must Go" campaign was proudly racist. In the novel, *Greenmantle*<sup>16</sup>, he wrote, "The truth is that we (English) are the only race on earth that can produce men capable of getting inside the skin of remote peoples." Buchan referred to the Young Turks as "a collection of Jews and Gypsies." In the novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*<sup>17</sup>, Buchan wrote, "Away behind all the governments and armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by a very dangerous people...The Jew was behind it... The Jew is everywhere...with an eye like a rattlesnake..."

The six Buchan objectives that serve as the foundation of the Blue Book continue to legitimate a racist attitude that the people of Turkey are unworthy of respect and dignity, of equality and sovereignty, and of the right to exist in Anatolia at peace as they have been doing for nearly one thousand years. In extreme cases, the Blue Book has been utilized to provide moral justification for terrorism by the Justice Commandos for the Armenian Genocide (JCAG) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA).<sup>18</sup> These terrorists killed more than 75 innocent people, wounded over 700 people, took more than 100 hostages, and caused tens of millions of dollars in property damage in the United

16 John Buchan, *The Greenmantle*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1916.

17 John Buchan, *The Thirty Nine Steps*, Edinburg, London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1915.

18 Gunther M. Michael, *Pursuing the Just Cause of Their People*, Greenwood Press. Inc, New York 1986.

States, Europe, Middle East and Australia.

As a masterpiece of propaganda and tool of deception that to date has not been retracted, the Blue Book continues to influence peoples' mind and soul. Today the Books of Wellington House are still recommended to American school children and university students. As historian Arthur Ponsonby who has also dealt with the wicked and lasting effects of the war propaganda that continues for generations in his book *Falsehood in Wartime*<sup>19</sup> has observed:

“The injection of the poison of hatred into men’s minds by means of falsehood is a greater evil in wartime than the actual loss of life. The defilement of the human soul is worse than the destruction of the human body.”

The validity of his cogent conception of Lord Ponsonby cannot be disputed either today or in the future. In fact, what we need today, more than ever, is an international environment that we can hand over to our children and to the future generations to build a world where tolerance, friendship and good will shall reign, instead of prejudices, hatred and sense of revenge.

The onus is upon all participants in WWI to support an ethical and objective approach to understanding this ambiguous part of our mutual history relating to the Ottoman State - Armenian conflict, and to facilitate the healing of the human soul.

It is with this belief and understanding as well as with the greatest respect and appreciation for the longstanding alliance and relationship Turkey shares with Great Britain and since Your Parliament asked in 1916 that the work of Toynbee be published as a “command book” we submit for your consideration this opportunity to bring clarity to this important part of our mutual history by retracting the Blue Book as a historical document.

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime*, London, Kimble and Bradford, 1928.