CANADA'S MORAL MANDATE FOR ARMENIA: SPARKING HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL INTEREST, 1880-1923

Posted on December 11, 2008 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Aram Adjemian MA, Ottawa-Montreal (MA thesis: Concordia University, 2007)

This thesis explores the efforts undertaken by Canadians in support of the Armenian people from 1880 to the 1920s. Canadians first heard about the deteriorating conditions of life for the Ottoman Armenians soon after Confederation.

Aram Adjemian MA, Ottawa-Montreal (MA thesis: Concordia University, 2007)

This thesis explores the efforts undertaken by Canadians in support of the Armenian people from 1880 to the 1920s. Canadians first heard about the deteriorating conditions of life for the Ottoman Armenians soon after Confederation.

By the late nineteenth century, many people in burgeoning Canadian social and religious movements believed that urbanisation and industrialisation were contributing to degeneration in Canadian cities. As circumstances became progressively worse for the Ottoman Armenians, the Canadian reform movements that were critical of their own society became involved in various relief efforts for the Armenian people. Criticism of society's evils was thus exported outside of Canada's borders as well.

Canadian Missionaries stationed in the Ottoman Empire and Protestant Canadians became most involved in at least five fundraising efforts for the Armenians held between 1880 and the 1920s. The missionaries sent reports of death and destruction back home, many of which were published in various Canadian media outlets. These reports in turn sparked several religious groups in the country to undertake a series of fundraising events to help the Armenians, which were sent to the Canadian missionaries for distribution. The administrators of several Canadian universities and other intellectuals also contributed their credibility and reputation for integrity in support of the Armenians.

Some of the missionaries, notably brothers William and Robert Chambers and Frederick MacCallum, were involved continually over several decades and even risked their own lives to save the Armenians. Many Canadians learned about the atrocities as a result of this network of Canadian religious associations and individuals, and of the media coverage they helped to generate. After the genocide, over a million Canadian dollars was collected and sent for Armenian relief, mainly through the efforts of Canadian Sunday schools and Toronto's *The Globe* newspaper.

Alongside *The Globe*'s campaign in early 1920, some Canadian Protestant groups lobbied the government to oppose the return of the Armenian provinces to Turkish rule. The Canadian government echoed these pleas, and demanded that the British government share with it timely and appropriate information about the negotiations of the Turkish peace treaty. In this environment, several prominent Canadian and British individuals wondered whether Canada might undertake a League of Nations for Armenia, which would have been an expensive and difficult undertaking. However, the vigorous Canadian reaction was short lived, and as interested parties became increasingly more preoccupied with domestic concerns, interest in the Armenians dissipated.

The failure to prepare the Canadian public for more sustained protest activities on behalf of the Armenians and initiate a discussion of a more meaningful Canadian role offers a practical perspective to consider the reaction to more recent humanitarian crises. It illustrates how preparing the public to support profound sacrifices in personal and public funds

is vital if international humanitarian interventions are to prove truly effective. Most of the primary manuscript material cited in this thesis was consulted at the Library and Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario.