

# Intervention by Victor Bérard in Favor of the Armenians

Victor Bérard

1903

**M. Bérard.** — The Armenian Committee of Lyon, which had already held meetings against the will of former ministers and ministers currently in office, held a large public meeting yesterday under the presidency of M. Augagneur, the mayor of Lyon, where the number of attendees was estimated to be between 2,500 and 3,000. During this meeting, M. Augagneur introduced Dr. Lortet, a professor at the university, and introduced me as well.

M. Lortet presented very new insights, given that, for the first time in his life, he was free to speak. He was able to share his recollections as an eyewitness to the massacres in Payas. I knew a great deal about the Turkish massacres, but I confess to you that I had never in my life heard of atrocities like these.

Dr. Lortet recounted his interactions with past ministers, such as M. Rambaud, Minister of Public Instruction, and M. Hanotaux, Minister of Foreign Affairs: it had been forbidden for M. Lortet, a French civil servant and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, to speak before an assembly of voters. I do not need to tell you how much times have changed today, and the very presence of M. Augagneur, mayor of Lyon, assures us that on this point, we can feel entirely reassured.

In Lyon, there is a very well-organized Committee, which has both political and economic goals, as the English delegates just highlighted. The aim is to establish a women's committee that will raise funds for Armenia and Macedonia, ensuring that this Committee remains free from any political involvement so that it cannot be accused of fomenting revolt or anarchy. It is understood that the funds raised by this Committee will be sent directly to French consuls in Armenia and Macedonia and that, without distinction of race, nationality, or religion, the French consul will distribute this French aid to all those in need.

As for the political objective, I was tasked with presenting the situation in general, and I did yesterday what I intend to do again this afternoon: I will attempt to explain to the Parisian public, as I did to the Lyonnais audience, how this situation is, in fact, common to the entirety of Turkey; how it is caused by general factors that, across all of Turkey, create an anarchist or revolutionary mindset that is merely the natural resistance of human beings defending their property and lives, their property against the Turkish regime, and their lives against the Hamidian regime. (*Cheers of approval.*)

I attempted to explain the Turkish regime on one hand and the Hamidian regime on the other. Then, I pointed out what remedy the Austro-Russian initiative claimed to offer, how the proposed reforms—even if successful—would only eliminate the abuses of the Turkish regime, while the Hamidian regime would persist, making it a mockery to guarantee property to populations whose very lives are not assured. (*New approval.*)

I sought to clarify that the reforms are only the second step of the Eastern Question, which involves two successive steps that must be addressed one after the other: one must not put the cart before the horse; the Hamidian regime must first be abolished, and then the Turkish regime must be reformed and controlled. To abolish the Hamidian regime: we have had sufficient experience, as this regime is merely a revival of what happened in 1825 in Samos, in 1860 in Syria, and in 1898 in Crete. From these precedents, we see that to abolish the Hamidian regime, it is evidently necessary to appoint a governor in the Turkish province, one who remains Turkish but who will maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, depending on the Porte but completely independent of the Sultan's Palace; it will thus be a responsible governor, dependent on the Porte but accountable to the Powers.

I must confess that regarding the governor, I have some very particular ideas. I believe that the example of Crete once again shows us that, whether Christian or Muslim, any governor who is Ottoman by nationality will never be able to resist intrigues, treacheries, or the seductions of Abdul-Hamid for long. Under such conditions, appointing a governor of Ottoman nationality is futile. I believe, therefore, that a responsible governor must, above all, be a European governor. Take this governor as you see fit, install him, and then, once you have appointed this governor, begin the reforms. It is evident that the first of these reforms must be an economic reform. If you do not provide these populations with the means to live, it is useless to grant them the right to live. Start by gathering a certain amount of funds. Let European powers lend to Armenia, as they did to Crete. On that day, I am convinced that peace will return to the Turkish Empire, and we will have the right to consider our efforts as having contributed to the salvation of Turkey, to the peace of Europe, and to the well-being of humanity.

That, gentlemen, is the spirit and substance of the Lyon conference. You were read the agenda earlier; it accurately summarizes our conference.

I must tell you that the Lyon Committee wished to play the greatest possible role in your meeting. It therefore delegated Professor Courmont, of the Faculty of Medicine. Professor Courmont will tell you that we can rely entirely on the Lyon public. During the Armenian affairs, we found much goodwill and financial support; Lyon may well be the first city in France where we were able to speak freely before an audience of civil servants, in an official hall, despite the prefect. You can be sure that, given the new situation now, with civil servants on our side, we will speak even more and achieve a more satisfactory result.

(*Loud applause.*)

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Intervention by Victor Bérard during a conference organized in 1903 by Pierre Quillard, in which other anarchists, such as Reclus, participated. Here, he reflects on the situation of his time within the Ottoman Empire, particularly concerning the treatment of Armenians, and attempts to envision a possible path toward anarchy in this context.

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