



حبر أبيض
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Domination of the press by Sultan Abdul Hamid II

In the modern era, the press is one of the most important manifestations of the renaissance of nations and peoples, as it is an evidence of their progress, renaissance and positions, an interpreter of their ideas, a defender of their rights before other nations, but rather a statement of their aspirations to the future. Through the historical reading of the diaries of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who ruled the Ottoman Empire for thirty-three years from 1909-1876 AD, what did the press mean to Sultan Abdul Hamid? Sultan Abdul Hamid says: **“It is strange that there are few newspapers that adhere to truth in their articles and news. In fact, it is difficult for reporters to get true news from behind the scenes, so these people go to the market of lies and find what they want in it”**. With these words, Sultan Abdul Hamid II sealed his famous thoughts and diaries, which are understood as a reflection of the dimensions of Sultan Abdul Hamid's personality, full of illusion, suspicion and anxiety about everything. It seems that the press has increased the state of illusion and suspicion about his character, so he made sure to manage it with an exaggerated degree of scrutiny for all the news that was written. The Sultan restricted many newspapers and magazines, sometimes by closure, and other times by preventing them from spreading in most of the Ottoman states. He was not satisfied with that, but placed the spies on the newspapers and what they write from inside and outside them, so that the readers were not spared from that espionage, all of which is a guarantee of his safety and the preservation of his status. He feared that the press would threaten his rule and his life. Therefore, he persecuted the press, issued orders to restrict its freedom, and restricted it through surveillance and espionage, especially after the work of the "envoys council" and the constitution was suspended. In 1877 AD, he formed a special supervisory authority, which he placed under the Directorate of Publications. A year later, he repealed the first Ottoman law on publications, which had been issued in 1865. He went too far. In 1898 AD, he made some of the printing houses under the supervision of the police in order to control what is printed and published!

Sultan Abdul Hamid explains this severe censorship as a vital matter in the Ottoman countries, and whoever sees otherwise is wrong! He believes that the acceptance of journalistic criticism by Europeans is due to their increased cultural awareness more than the Ottoman people, who have only a little knowledge! He believes that treating people should be like treating children who do not know what is best for them, so books, publications and foreign novels that could spoil them have been banned. This is undoubtedly considered a form of unprecedented despotism by dominating the intellectual and cultural freedoms of people and making them ignorant, and not as an enlightenment sought by the Sultan for his people.

In fact, what was published at that time was only in the official Ottoman newspapers such as “Takvim-i Vekayi” the official newspaper of the Ottoman Empire, which included orders, royal directives, appointments, internal and external news, and arts. There was also “Al-Huqooq” newspaper, which dealt with legal and legal issues only, and “Al-Jawa'eb” newspaper and “Al-Kawkab Al-Othmani” newspaper. Those newspapers were publishing what the Sultan wanted and deemed appropriate and satisfied by words of praise in praise of his justice. Many other newspapers followed their approach. We cannot ignore the role that the Publications Directorate exercised during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid in suppressing freedoms and silencing voices, using the authority and power against the intellectuals and the media. It took over the prior censorship of everything published through its spies who write their reports, and then they reach Sultan Abdul Hamid personally. These reports occupied a large portion of his attention, although many of them lacked credibility.

Sultan Abdul Hamid used to send his instructions to the editors-in-chief of newspapers and their owners through the Publications Directorate, as it was the official body that monitored press materials before they were printed and published, and it prevented the publication of any translations of foreign newspapers. In addition to that, it is prohibited from using pseudonyms in newspaper articles and even comic newspapers. The strict restrictions that in turn affected the press and cultural life increased, and it became one-sided and oriented. This was explained by the fact that the Publications Directorate issued many lists of prohibitions from printing and publishing at the press, media and cultural levels. Most of the states of the empire were affected by this unjust approach, including our Arab region in the Levant, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. We mention here, for example, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mughairy, who is one of the sons of the Arabian Peninsula from the people of the aflaj. During his stay in Astana in 1880 AD, he issued a newspaper that was called “Al-Munbah”. After he finished its first issue and sent it to be printed, an order was issued by the Sultan to stop the newspaper and prevent its publication, which made al-Mughairy move to Cairo and join the opponents of the policy of tyranny and silencing. Egypt has become a refuge for many intellectuals and journalists fleeing the hell of tyranny. The matter was not limited to intellectuals only, but it also went beyond it to some Arab merchants and notables in the Arab Gulf, who in turn were subjected to harassment, due to their participation in some newspapers issued from Egypt. We can understand from this that the state was dealing with the press and cultural figures in a dark tyrannical way.