

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Economic Policies of Uthman

Economic restraints

Umar had placed restraints on the economic activities of the people. He had placed restrictions on the trading activities of the Quraish. Umar had placed a ban on the sale of lands in conquered territories. He had also placed a ban on the movements of the Companions and did not permit them to leave Madina. Uthman was a shrewd businessman and trader. He knew that trade could not flourish under restraints. He was a democrat by temperament, and he therefore withdrew the restrictions that had been imposed by Umar with regard to the sale of land or the movements of the people. Uthman also permitted the eminent Companions to draw loans from the public treasury. The economic reforms introduced by Uthman had a far reaching effect. The Quraish, shrewd businessmen as they were, took full advantage of the liberal policies of Uthman, and as a consequence their business flourished and they amassed a good deal of fortune. With this wealth they purchased lands in the conquered territories particularly Sawad in Iraq. In the time of Uthman, they did not merely enjoy dominance in political power, they came to enjoy monopoly in economic power as well. When the Companions were allowed the right of free movement and they were allowed the facility of drawing loans from the public treasury, most of the Companions purchased lands in conquered areas. Some of the Companions became the owners of large estates. The policy of Umar was that whatever the Companions had gained during the time of the Holy Prophet was enough for them and that they should live henceforward a retired life, "hereunder neither the world should see them, nor they should see the world. Uthman had a different view about the role of the Companions. He was of the view that the services of the Companions, the founding fathers of Islam, should be recognized, and facilities should be provided to them so that they might live in comfort in their old age. During the time of Uthman because of the economic measures of Uthman most of the Companions grew very rich. Brisk building activity took place in Madina. Many palatial buildings grew up in the city, and the city expanded a good deal. The economic policies of Uthman though conceived in public interest had serious political repercussions. Economic power came to be concentrated in the hands of a small group. That led to a gulf between the haves and the havenots. Most of the troubles that Uthman had to face were directly or indirectly due to the economic measures of Uthman which led to the creation of a class which monopolized economic power. This led to some imbalance in Islamic society committed to an egalitarian order. We cannot blame Uthman for these economic measures. His policies aimed at the economic development of the country, and no person can be blamed for promoting economic prosperity. Difficulties arose because some of the persons grew rich overnight, and no institutions were devised to regulate the proper flow of wealth. That provided an opportunity to some of the Muslims like Abu Dhar Ghaffari who stood for an austere way of life to criticize Uthman and his administration. If all these facts are assessed objectively the conclusion that emerges is that Uthman was in advance of his age, and he devised measures for which instead of being praised and admired he was criticized and even maligned.

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Source : Alim.org-Uthman History