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Towards Multi-Party Politics and Democracy, 1938–1960

İNÖNÜ’S NEW PRESIDENCY

The transition of political power following Atatürk’s death was smooth, and any sign of infighting for the leadership within the RPP was hidden from public gaze. Thus on 11 November, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey elected unanimously İsmet İnönü as the republic’s new president. İnönü’s election surprised many observers, because in 1937 there was a rift between Atatürk and İnönü, and Atatürk had replaced him as prime minister with Celal Bayar, suggesting that İnönü was being bypassed in the succession. Some have even suggested that in his secret will, kept in the presidential library in Ankara, Atatürk is said to have declared: ‘Let Marshal Fevzi Çakmak be the president after me’. If so, Atatürk’s wish was disregarded and İnönü, supported by General Fevzi Çakmak, the chief of staff since 1923, was elected Turkey’s second president. İsmet İnönü had managed to maintain his hold over the party machine, despite his fall, and as a result he was able to secure his election. But his position with the people of Turkey was weak, for he lacked the stature of Atatürk. Therefore in December, the RPP’s Extra-Ordinary Congress met and declared Atatürk as the Party’s founder and ‘eternal leader’, while İsmet Pasha was declared its ‘permanent national chief’, or *Milli Sef*. These changes suggested that İnönü was emulating the leadership

principle prevalent in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in order to bolster his position at home and abroad.

Given the tensions in Europe and the possibility of war, İnönü brought about political harmony at home by pursuing a policy of reconciliation with opponents of Atatürk and Kemalism. People who had lived in exile during Atatürk's rule returned to Turkey and became active in politics again. At the same time, he gave the government broad powers to regulate the economy by having the assembly pass the National Defence Law on 18 January 1939. The following week, Celal Bayar, a liberal, anti-statist politician, resigned as PM and was replaced by Dr Refik Saydam, who had been minister of the interior and general secretary of the RPP. Thereafter, the two offices of party secretary-general and minister of the interior were separated, suggesting that the RPP was giving up its control over the bureaucracy established in the mid-1930s. That was an illusion, for the party's hold over the state remained firm; only that of individual politicians was weakened. When general elections were held in March 1939, in a house of 424 deputies, there were 125 new faces; some men who had been close to Atatürk were not elected, while such rivals and opponents as Fethi Okyar, Kazım Karabekir, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, Refet Bele and Ali Fuad Cebesoy, entered the assembly. At the same time, Mustafa Kemal's landing at Samsun on 19 May 1919, was celebrated for the first time, suggesting that the post-Atatürk regime would continue to honour the republic's founder. The celebration became known as the 'Youth Festival' and has been celebrated each year thereafter.

İnönü continued to liberalize the regime, appointing Fethi Okyar as Minister of Justice in May. On 29 May, he permitted the formation of the 'Independent Group' in the assembly which was expected to act as the loyal opposition to the government. But this was a paper reform, for the group did not take its oppositional role seriously and allowed the government to ride roughshod, with the passage of certain completely undemocratic laws that were passed during the war.

President İnönü's principal task was to steer his country safely through the world crisis. He had still to prove himself in the wake of Atatürk's charismatic leadership. Though he had been Atatürk's right-hand man from the early twenties until 1937, he was thought

to be neither imaginative nor dynamic. Hitler is said to have remarked to his commanders that, after the death of Atatürk, Turkey would be ruled by morons and half-idiots. Given his bullying policy towards post-Atatürk Turkey, Stalin may have reached a similar conclusion. But they were wrong. İnönü was a cautious man, unwilling to gamble the future of the republic by opting for the wrong side; the memory of the First World War was still fresh in the minds of that generation and they did not want to repeat the error of the Unionists. So when the Second World War broke out in September 1939, İnönü chose to remain neutral, even though Turkey had signed declarations of friendship and mutual assistance with Britain in May and with France in June 1939. In return for Turkey's pledge, France agreed to cede Alexandretta, a part of Syria (known in Turkey as Hatay) to Ankara. The German–Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 marked the end of any possibility of a tripartite (Anglo-French-Soviet) guarantee against the threat of fascist aggression. Turkey was now more determined than ever to maintain its neutrality.

WAR IN EUROPE

Ankara watched the war in Europe closely, hoping that neither side would win an overwhelming victory and dominate Europe. An Allied victory would be to Moscow's advantage, while an Axis victory would guarantee Italian hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean. For the moment, Turkey's foreign policy seemed directed by her foreign trade, which she juggled between the two blocs. On 18 June 1941, three days before Germany invaded Russia, Turkey signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. The invasion gave Ankara breathing space – Germany having already invaded and occupied Bulgaria and Greece, was incapable of invading Turkey while she fought Russia. Many in Turkey believed that Hitler would knock out Russia in a short war and force Britain and France to make peace. Consequently, in the summer of 1942, Ankara announced that it would join the war on the German side if Russia were defeated.

War, neutrality and mobilization undermined whatever gains the economy had made during the thirties. The government had been forced to implement the 'national defence law' in January 1940, to

counter the hoarding, profiteering and shortages that had resulted since the outbreak of war. Price controls were introduced and rents frozen to the April 1940 level, the working day was increased by three hours and the weekly holiday abolished in many workplaces. Indirect taxation increased sharply on such essentials as sugar, tea, and transportation. German successes in Russia encouraged the racist element in the Turkish elite to harass their own minorities, so much so that in November 1942, the assembly passed the notorious and controversial wealth tax law, known in Turkish as *Varlık Vergisi*. Its ostensible purpose was to raise around US \$360 million from businesses that had profited from the war; but taxes were assessed according to the taxpayer's religion and not his wealth. There were separate lists for Muslims, non-Muslims, foreigners and for the Dönme, a sect of Jews who had converted to Islam in the seventeenth century. As a result of this tax, many non-Muslims were forced to sell their assets (real estate, factories, etc.), which were then purchased by members of the new Muslim bourgeoisie at well below market prices, enriching that class, at the same time as alienating it from the government!

Fortunately, the pressure on the minorities eased soon after the German army surrendered at Stalingrad in February 1943, and the tide began to turn against Berlin. The following month, Avram Galanté, a Turkish Jew, was elected to the assembly, while the pro-German journalist, Yunus Nadi lost his seat. These were signals that İnönü was abandoning Turkey's benevolent neutrality towards Germany and leaning towards the Allies. In September 1943, victims of the wealth tax who had been sent to a work camp in eastern Anatolia were pardoned and the tax was annulled in March 1944. The racist pan-Turkist movement that had been supported by German money and propaganda and had become influential even in government circles, was finally banned and prosecuted. In May 1944, its leaders were put on trial and İnönü personally denounced pan-Turkism in his 19 May Youth Day speech. The trials only ended in March 1947, during the cold war, when Moscow, not Germany, was the enemy. The accused were acquitted and lauded as nationalists who had struggled against a subversive ideology, i.e. communism! Pan-Turkism was an instrument to be employed in the game of international politics.

As the world war wound down, the İnönü regime found itself in a difficult predicament. The majority of the people in Turkey were suffering severe hardship. All the basic needs were in short supply. Bread rationing had been introduced in January 1942 and a law passed that virtually permitted the forced collection of agricultural produce. All classes except the bureaucracy were alienated from the regime: businessmen by the arbitrary wealth tax, which had enriched a few Muslims but revealed how autocratic the state could be; the landlords and peasants by the agrarian legislation and the harsh and arbitrary rule of the gendarmerie; and the urban masses by the labour legislation, which overworked them, gave low wages and left them hungry.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

İsmet İnönü understood that the world had changed radically as a result of the victory of the Allies over fascism, and that he had to respond to the situation before there was an explosion at home. On 1 November 1945, he declared that the political system would be reformed so as to bring it in line with the emerging world order of capitalism and democracy. The Turkish political system lacked an opposition party and he would permit the formation of such a body. Though the defeat of the fascists had undermined the legitimacy of a single-party state in Turkey, internal factors also made it untenable. The political alliance between the military-bureaucratic elite, the landlords, and the rising bourgeoisie had brought about the success of the war of liberation and the early Kemalist regime. The very success of the regime, the growth of capitalism, both urban and rural, eroded that alliance, and bourgeoisie and landlords were no longer willing to tolerate the system. Besides, the economy required a vast injection of capital, and that could only be provided by America. Washington, in turn, encouraged the anti-statist forces and the establishment of a free market. In Turkey, the problem could only be resolved with a struggle within the RPP, between the liberal and the statist wings; rather than liberalize the system, the statist wanted to strengthen their hold on the state even further.

The land reform bill of January 1945 polarized opinion in the country. The statist wanted to redistribute land, break the

political and economic power of the landowners and transform Turkey into a republic of independent peasant proprietors, akin to the Balkan states. Though parliament passed the bill, the RPP was fragmented as a result, leading to the founding of the Democrat Party in January 1946. Its founders – Celal Bayar, businessman and banker; Refik Koraltan, a bureaucrat; Fuad Köprülü, a professor; and Adnan Menderes, a landowner – were all respected members of the RPP. They called for the implementation of a multi-party system, democracy, and the inviolability of private property. Three of the dissidents were expelled from the RPP and Bayar resigned. They responded by forming the Democrat Party, thus opening a new page in Turkey's political life.

THE FORMATION OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY

Initially, the Democrats were seen as another loyal opposition, created by men who came out of the RPP. After all, its founding members were all Kemalists of long standing and offered virtually the same political and economic programme as the ruling party. Mahmud Celal Bayar had also paid his political dues. He was born in a village in Bursa province in 1884. In 1903, he joined the Bursa branch of the Deutsche Orient Bank and was an active member of the Committee of Union and Progress. After the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1918, Bayar organized the national struggle in the İzmir region. In 1923, he was elected deputy for İzmir in the assembly and minister for reconstruction in the 1924 cabinet. He won the confidence of Mustafa Kemal and was hand-picked to lead the tiny private sector. He founded the Business Bank of Turkey (*Türkiye İş Bankası*) in 1924, which became one of the engines of economic change and is still one of the principal economic institutions in the country. During the economic crisis of 1932, Bayar was appointed Minister of National Economy, and in 1937 replaced İnönü as Atatürk's last prime minister. When İnönü became president, Bayar resigned and was given no further ministerial post. He next appeared on the political scene in 1945, as leader of the dissident faction in the ruling RPP.

Mustafa İsmet İnönü came from a social background similar to that of Bayar. He was also born in 1884 and, as with so many youths of his class, had a military schooling, where he acquired a

modern education that paved the way to social mobility in a society that offered few opportunities to Muslim youths. He graduated as a staff captain in 1905 and served in many parts of the empire. In the Greco-Turkish war, he won the Battle of İnönü (hence his surname) in 1921. İnönü became a loyal supporter of Kemal Pasha and was sent to the Lausanne conference as leader of the Turkish delegation to negotiate the peace treaty, establishing a reputation as a clever negotiator. He served as prime minister during the twenties and thirties, but was forced to resign in 1937. He had become one of the principal figures in the party–state bureaucracy and was therefore well situated to be elected president on Atatürk's death. As president, he kept Turkey out of the war but he became unpopular with the masses because of the virtual police state he established in which he was designated the 'national leader'. By 1945, İnönü had the foresight to see that times had changed and that he now had to preside over the dismantling of the single-party regime and the introduction of multi-party politics, though not necessarily democracy.

The mood in Turkey had changed dramatically since Atatürk's death, and the party that had played such a crucial role in the creation of the new Turkey was no longer trusted. The RPP was no longer seen as capable of leading Turkey in the postwar new world order. Initially, the Republicans were unaware of the changing mood in the country, convinced that all they needed to do in order to regain popularity was to carry out some reforms. The Democrats shared the same Kemalist philosophy, with perhaps a slight difference in emphasis: they were expected to enhance the government's legitimacy by acting as its official opposition. Initially, even the public did not take the Democrat Party seriously, for its programme hardly differed from that of the Republicans; after all, the constitution required that all parties adopt the six arrows of Kemalism. But the Democrats claimed that they would interpret these principles according to the new circumstances and that their aim was to advance democracy in Turkey. They wanted to curb the interventionist state and enhance individual rights and liberties. The Democrats were populists, who claimed that political initiatives should come from the people and not from the party or the state. They spoke for private enterprise and the individual, as the liberals had during the Young Turks era; very soon they had

won over much of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, the educated segment of the urban population, as well as journalists and academics. They already had the support of the landlords.

When the Republicans finally sensed hostility to their rule in the country, they began to liberalize the party and society. İnönü abandoned his titles of 'national leader' and 'permanent chairman' of the RPP and agreed that the party would elect a chairman every four years. But people saw these as cosmetic changes and they were right, for İnönü continued to lead the party until his ouster in 1972! The radicals in the RPP wanted their party to become a 'class party', to win over the peasants, workers, tenant farmers, artisans and small merchants and isolate the Democrats as the representatives of landlords and big business. However, despite these changes in the regulations, the conservatives remained dominant and the RPP continued to be a party that was all things to all men. As a result, the Republicans lost the support of most groups and were forced to rely on their traditional supporters in the most underdeveloped part of Turkey, in eastern and central Anatolia.

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 1946 AND 1950

İnönü decided to hold an early general election, in 1946 rather than in 1947, before the Democrats had more time to organize and become a real electoral threat. But Bayar said that the Democrats would boycott the poll unless the laws were made more democratic. The DP's boycott would have robbed the government of its legitimacy and therefore İnönü was forced to amend certain undemocratic laws in order to appease the DP. The electoral law was amended and direct elections were introduced. After 1908, elections were two-tiered: voters elected representatives locally, who then elected the parliamentary deputies from the party list. Universities were granted administrative autonomy and the press laws were liberalized.

The Democrats knew that they would not do well in the 1946 election because they had not completed their organization throughout the country: bureaucracy remained hostile to them, and the voters were not sure whether the multi-party system would continue to function. Thus the RPP's victory in 1946 came as no

surprise: it won 390 of the 465 seats, while the Democrats managed to win only 65 – not a bad showing in an election marred by corruption and state repression. But the political atmosphere was poisoned, which had a detrimental effect on the country's political life. The period after the 1946 election was crucial for the establishment of multi-party political life. The struggle between radicals and moderates within the RPP continued, but on 12 July 1947, President İnönü decided to support the moderates and undermine the radicals. Consequently, the pressure on the Democrats eased and they were allowed total freedom of action and equality with the governing party.

İnönü hoped to revive his party's political fortunes by adopting liberal measures. The economy was cautiously opened up to market forces; the currency was devalued, import facilities eased and banks were permitted to sell gold. These measures resulted in inflation, with the cost of living index rising from 100 in 1938 to 386.8 in August 1946, and to 412.9 as a consequence of the devaluation. The business community was encouraged by these measures but the voters were alienated even more. Bayar found that he could exploit economic discontent against the government. Although İnönü was known as a devout laicist/secularist, he allowed the government to restore religious instruction in schools. Religious concessions were considered of prime importance to isolate the Democrat Party as well as the Nation Party, formed in 1948 by conservative DP dissidents, who wanted even greater religious freedom. İnönü seemed to be abandoning three of the principal pillars of Kemalist ideology: statism, revolutionism, and laicism, and even embracing Islam. Having carried out these reforms, by 1950 the Republicans were so sure of success in the coming elections that they thought that the DP might become politically irrelevant; they even offered some seats to the Democrats so as to ensure the existence of an opposition in the new parliament!

İnönü's policy of pandering to popular sentiment and opening up the economy did little to enhance the party's reputation with the voters. When the general election was held on 14 May 1950, the voters delivered a devastating blow to the RPP and elected the Democrats with an overwhelming majority.

The Democrats had exploited the popular memory of past grievances inflicted during twenty-seven years of Republican rule.

Voters were told that nothing would change while İnönü remained in power; İnönü – not Atatürk – had come to symbolize single-party authoritarianism. The Democrats had also succeeded in winning over the bureaucracy by holding the party and not the state responsible for Turkey's problems. Without the tacit neutrality of the bureaucracy, if not its active support, the Democrats were unlikely to win, because Turkish people both feared and respected state officials and were often guided by them. When officials did not canvass for the governing party, the voters took note. Of the 90 per cent turnout, 53 per cent voted Democrat and gave them an overwhelming majority of 408 seats in parliament. The Republicans won a respectable 38 per cent of the vote, but only 39 seats; this was because they had instituted the winner-takes-all principle in the electoral system, a system that had served them well in the past.

The 1950 electoral triumph of the Democrats was seen, at the time, and is still described by some scholars, as a turning-point in the history of modern Turkey. The party in power had accepted the verdict of the voter, and this was seen as a great step forward for the democratic process, at a time when a struggle was raging between communist authoritarianism and the 'free world'. In actual fact, the change in Turkey was not as dramatic as it seemed. It is true that new political forces represented by the DP had entered the political arena, but in power they continued to work with the same instrument – the restrictive 1924 constitution – as had the Republicans. The great change in the 1950s resulted from the process of decolonization and the cold war, and that affected life in Turkey as well.

THE COLD WAR AND ITS EFFECTS ON TURKEY

As the Second World War ended, the Allies – Britain and the Soviet Union – were in the process of dividing Europe into spheres of influence. Until Germany's defeat at the battle of Stalingrad, Turkey had been benevolently neutral towards Berlin. After Stalingrad, Ankara began to favour the Allies. Stalin began to raise the question of the straits with Churchill, in Moscow in October 1944, and again in Yalta, in February 1945. The Allies agreed to discuss the question, to inform Turkey of their deliberations and to

guarantee her independence. Recently opened Soviet archives inform us that, as early as May 1945, Turkey proposed a bilateral treaty of friendship with Moscow, sending, so Stalin thought, a clear message that Ankara was willing to alienate its ally Britain. Heartened by what Stalin considered Turkish timidity, in June, he verbally demanded the lease of a base on the Turkish Straits and the concession of two territories, Kars and Ardahan – territories conquered by Tsarist Russia in 1878, and ceded by Lenin to Atatürk under the treaty of 1922. Stalin, we are told, looked upon the straits, not only as an issue of Soviet security, but also as a matter of prestige. He believed that Turkey, impressed with the victories of the Red Army, would give in to his demands, and then Washington and London would accept it as a *fait accompli*. Later, Vyacheslav Molotov, commissar for foreign affairs, admitted that Stalin had overplayed his hand and had been too arrogant in 1945. Soviet demands, said Molotov, were ill-timed and unrealistic. But Stalin insisted that he push for joint ownership of the straits. By 1946, realizing its mistake, Moscow had abandoned its claims on Turkey. Recent American scholarship, based on US archival documents, agrees that there were no Soviet demands, only proposals and conditions – and there is a major difference between demands and proposals – for renewing the Turkish–Soviet Treaty of Friendship of 1925 that expired in November 1945. Even the Turkish foreign minister, Hasan Saka, was relieved when he read the Soviet démarche and saw that there was no explicit demand for bases on Turkish soil.

The cold war crisis between Moscow and Washington over Greece, Turkey and Iran, made Turkey an important regional player. The crisis also allowed the Truman administration to push its programme of rearmament through Congress and the Senate. In Washington there were two schools of thought about dealing with the Soviets: the State Department viewed the Soviet challenge as essentially political and economic, and therefore best met by political and economic means; the Pentagon viewed the Soviet threat as primarily military, to be met by a system of alliances, of which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the first. The Pentagon school prevailed in US relations with Turkey.

The cold war climate accelerated Turkey's involvement with Washington. Both parties believed that Turkey required foreign

capital investment for rapid economic growth, and this would only be forthcoming if Turkey joined the West and served its interests in the Middle East. Stalin's bullying tactics towards Turkey facilitated the rapprochement with Washington, especially as civil war broke out in neighbouring Greece. A friendly Turkey became a valuable asset for Washington, and was therefore included in the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and the Marshall Plan, designed to hasten the economic recovery of Europe. The statist faction in the RPP was finally defeated in 1947, with the resignation of Prime Minister Recep Peker; thereafter both parties pursued a bipartisan policy, designed to project a stable image of Turkey to the West.

Ankara was not happy about its relations with the West. The West had made no commitment to defend Turkey in the event of Soviet aggression, and after the formation of NATO in 1949, Ankara wanted a guarantee that the West would come to its defence in case of war with the Soviet Union. Washington was reluctant to make such a commitment. The Pentagon was content to use Turkey's armed forces, which it was rapidly modernizing to blunt any Soviet attack in that region, and to have bomber bases in Turkey.

But İnönü wanted a firm commitment from Washington and not just military and economic aid. By the late 1940s, there was talk of non-alignment in Ankara's political circles, a concept that became popular in parts of the postwar world. In April 1949, when Foreign Minister Sadak visited Washington, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was struck by his argument in favour of Turkey's neutrality if she were given no US guarantee. US diplomats and military officers feared that Turkey might seek a position of neutrality and the United States would be unable to capitalize on its investments in Turkey.

Turkey's considerable bargaining position proved insufficient to win any concessions from Washington, and İnönü made no headway in the negotiations. When the Democrats came to power in May 1950, they pursued the same policy and their initiatives were not taken seriously either. The contribution of Turkish troops in the Korean War and Turkey's participation in Washington's 'containment policy' against the Soviet Union seemed to make no difference. When Celal Bayar, now president of Turkey, saw the American ambassador in February 1951, he expressed his personal

displeasure with the US–Turkish relationship and hinted at the possibility of neutrality in case of war with the Soviet Union. This had the desired effect. Despite British opposition (Britain wanted to restrict Turkey's membership to the Middle East Defence Organisation), both Turkey and Greece became full members of NATO in February 1952. Once in NATO, Turkey abandoned all her foreign policy options and became totally committed to the organization. Atatürk's policy of never wanting Russia and Turkey to be enemies again was abandoned; so was Kemalist geo-strategic thinking that Turkey was no longer a part of the Middle East. Inside NATO, Turkey assumed the role of 'bridge' between the West and the Middle East, a role that was institutionalized with the formation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Britain. Its alleged aim was to contain the Soviet Union, but it was directed also against the Arab nationalist movement led by Nasser of Egypt. Although Washington did not join the pact, it remained the material and moral inspiration behind it. The Baghdad Pact established Turkey's leadership of the conservative regimes in the region and it became a link between NATO and the Middle East. But it also meant that Ankara became isolated from the emerging third world, especially at the United Nations.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

In power, the Democrats aroused great hope in the country. They had brought to an end the era of authoritarian single-party rule. They promised to rule democratically and bring about modernization and prosperity. In actual fact, there was no real ideological difference between the governing party and the opposition: both parties were committed to the creation of a modern, prosperous Turkey. The Democrats employed the slogans of making Turkey into a 'little America', an idea put forward by a Republican politician in 1948, and of creating 'a millionaire in every quarter'. The opposition could not dispute a vision that they also shared; they only differed over the method of achieving these goals.

Perhaps the major difference between the Democrats and the Republicans was the speed with which the two parties wanted to develop Turkey. Having won such an overwhelming victory at the

polls, the Democrats believed that the nation stood behind their programme. They believed in ‘majoritarian democracy’ – that the majority could do as it wished because it was the majority by virtue of its victory at the polls. They were therefore intolerant of criticism and any obstacles that might stand in the way of their programme. They subscribed to the ideology of Kemalism, but only in so far as it was interpreted according to the needs and circumstances of the times. Some of the ‘isms’, they argued, had served their purpose and had to be modified. For example, Turkey no longer needed a paternalistic state, and therefore statism had become redundant in an age of free enterprise.

The Democrats saw themselves as social engineers who understood their society and knew what was best for the people; this was in keeping with the Kemalist dictum: ‘for the people, despite the people’. They agreed that the Republicans had made a vital contribution to the creation of Turkey during the early republic but the RPP had become an anachronism and was no longer in touch with the people or their needs. The RPP in opposition was therefore expected to play the role of official opposition and watch patiently as the DP transformed Turkey’s economy and society. As for the Nation Party, formed in 1948 by conservative Democrats who wanted greater religious freedom, it too was redundant because the DP would pass laws to liberalize religious practice in order to meet the spiritual needs of the Turkish people. On 16 June 1950, barely a month after they came to power, they passed a law restoring the call to prayer (*ezan*) in Arabic; the *ezan* had been called in Turkish only since June 1941. The Democrats also restored the language of the constitution to its Ottoman original and away from the reformed Turkish of the Kemalist era, and began the process of coming to terms with Turkey’s Ottoman past. In the prevailing climate of the cold war and anti-communism, all parties left-of-centre were made illegal, and many of their leading members put in jail or exiled. Nazım Hikmet, a communist poet, had to flee the country and live in exile in the Soviet bloc, while the left-wing writer, Sabaheddin Ali, was murdered by right-wing extremists.

Their electoral success in the 1950 elections led the Democrats to believe that the people supported their programme and that they represented the ‘national will’ (*milli irade*) to which they would be

held accountable every four years at election time. For that reason, they did not take the opposition or its criticism seriously. During the early years of DP rule, the country seemed to be growing rapidly, thanks to the demand for Turkish products in Europe and the Korean War boom. Moreover Marshall Law aid also opened up the country to the West.

Turkey was led by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes (1899–1960). He was chosen by President Bayar as his prime minister over the older and more experienced Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966), the intellectual, because Menderes belonged to a younger generation and was thought to have a vision for postwar Turkey. He belonged to a wealthy landowning family in the cotton-growing province of Aydın, in western Anatolia. Menderes had matured during the Kemalist era and had entered politics by joining Ali Fethi's Free Republican Party in 1930. When the party was dissolved, he joined the RPP and, in 1945, sided with the dissidents against the land reform bill. He was expelled from the RPP and became a founding member of the Democrat Party.

Menderes viewed political power as the tool necessary for Turkey's rapid growth. He had no time for amending the anti-democrat laws or the establishment of a neutral administration that the Democrats had called for while in opposition. In keeping with the principle of an 'above-party' president, Celal Bayar resigned from the DP and Menderes was elected party chairman. But that was a cosmetic reform, for Bayar was too closely associated with the party to cut all his ties from it. In other areas, the DP government tightened its grip on the penal code adopted in the mid-1930s from the Italian model, and laws became more repressive, in keeping with the frigid political atmosphere created by the cold war. Moreover the Republicans were kept under constant pressure by the threat of liquidating the party's assets.

The situation worsened after Menderes's victory in the 1954 election. Turkey was going through a period of prosperity and there was a mood of optimism in the country. Voters had benefited from economic growth and showed their appreciation by supporting a government that had opened up the country and made it less bureaucratic. The Democrats had distributed state lands to some landless peasants, introduced mechanization on the farms by importing agricultural machinery from the US and

increased production. The Agricultural Bank, founded in Ottoman times, extended credit to farmers, while the state subsidized wheat and cotton, as well as increasing storage facilities for farm produce. Weather during the first half of the 1950s had also favoured the farmer and world wheat prices were unusually high, thanks to the demand generated by the Korean War. As a result, the countryside, especially the big farmers, had benefited and were happy to vote for the DP.

The urban intelligentsia, the universities and the professionals, who had mostly supported the DP because it had promised political liberalization, were disappointed and became disillusioned with the party's performance in power. They saw that democratic and multi-party politics could not function with institutions inherited from the single-party period. Such institutions as the 1924 constitution and the penal code were anachronisms and had to be amended in order to suit Turkish society living during the second half of the twentieth century. The DP government showed no concern for such detail. Menderes became dismissive of critics as his power grew and smothered democracy within his own party. In opposition, the Democrats had won the support of the small working class in Turkey by promising them the right to strike, which had been denied them by the single-party regime. When Menderes was reminded of this promise, he replied: 'Is Turkey to have strikes? Let's have some economic development first and then we'll think about this matter'. That summed up his attitude towards democracy; for the time being, it was to be sacrificed on the altar of economic growth!

Despite their electoral strength, the Democrats suffered from an inferiority complex that left them feeling insecure. They may have won the support of the voters and were now the government, but they did not feel that the instruments of state – the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the army – stood behind them. These institutions were the creation of the RPP and were suspected of being loyal to the opposition. This was especially true of the army, which was thought to be loyal to İnönü, still known by his military title, İsmet Pasha. There were rumours of a military coup when the DP won the election in 1950, with subsequent great relief when the generals did not intervene. Nevertheless, Menderes carried out a purge in the top ranks of the army, and retired those who were considered

İnönü loyalists, replacing them with loyal Democrats. He did the same with a number of provincial governors and other senior positions in the bureaucracy. The Democrats suffered from what was described as the ‘Pasha factor’, an irrational fear that they would not be safe in office as long as İnönü led the opposition. They came to believe that İnönü, known as ‘the cunning fox’, was the cause of all their troubles, and that the Republican opposition would be ineffectual without him. Even the Republicans believed this myth, and no leader from within the party emerged to challenge İnönü’s leadership, even though he was already 70 years old in 1954. Had İnönü retired from political life when his party lost the 1950 election, Turkey’s history might have taken a different turn. Menderes and the Democrats would have felt more confident and perhaps would have behaved more fairly and justly towards the opposition. New leadership would have emerged within the RPP and the party would have reformed and adapted itself in keeping up with the needs of the times. While İnönü led the party, it was impossible to imagine any change; he was a figure from the past and cast a huge shadow under which nothing new could grow. For the Democrats, their ten-year rule was their failure to come to terms with the ‘Pasha factor’.

After Menderes was hanged by the military junta that seized power in May 1960, there was a droll joke doing the rounds of Ankara. Menderes went to heaven and met Atatürk one day, and Atatürk asked him about political life in Turkey. Menderes then recounted in detail all that had befallen the country since Atatürk’s death, ending with his own execution. Menderes concluded: ‘Well Pasha, that’s Kısmet (fate)’. ‘No Adnan’, replied Atatürk, ‘that’s İsmet, not Kısmet’!

Menderes’s undemocratic rule cannot be explained away simply by the RPP and the ‘Pasha factor’. However insecure he may have felt, he knew that the opposition was weak and disorganized and gave him nothing to fear. Menderes’s political apprehension was founded on the makeup of his own party. The Democrats had never been as homogeneous as they appeared to be while in opposition. The top echelon of the party’s leadership came out of dissidents in the RPP. But much of its provincial support came from people who entered politics only after the party was established in January 1946. Such people remembered the harsh rule of the

provincial gendarmerie and had an irrational hatred for the RPP and İnönü. Many were blinded by the spirit of revenge and wanted the party to take a hard line with the RPP, even while it was the governing party. They accused their leader of colluding with İnönü, and some even left the DP and went on to form the Nation Party in 1948. In power, these DP dissidents accused Menderes of being no different from the Republicans and of offering virtually the same programme.

Menderes was confronted repeatedly with such criticism at provincial party congresses. He soon learned that his internal opposition was more troublesome than the opposition in parliament. He knew that he could appease DP dissidents by taking harsh measures against the RPP. That policy partly explains the anti-democratic laws his government passed against the RPP, as well as laws against such institutions as the universities and the press. Menderes may have won over some of his dissidents, but these measures alienated the liberal intelligentsia, who had supported the DP from the very beginning because of its promise of political liberalization. The intelligentsia, though few in number, were articulate and were a voice in the universities, the press, and the professions. The DP government was expected to strengthen civil society by furthering democratic freedoms instead of curbing them. But Menderes's measures against the press, the opposition, and university autonomy, all suggested that he was not committed to a more free and democratic Turkey. The government's ability to close down the opposition Nation Party in January 1954 revealed how fragile party politics could be.

Menderes was transformed by his success in the 1954 election. His popular vote had increased, as had his representation in parliament. He became convinced that he had chosen the correct policies because the people said so; he felt he no longer needed to consult even sympathetic journalists who had supported the DP since 1946. The only effective check on government was a strong opposition in the assembly. Since the founding of the Republic, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was the most powerful institution of the state. National sovereignty was vested in parliament, which elected the president from among its members. The president then appointed the prime minister, who formed his cabinet from among the 'representatives of the nation' (*milletvekili*), as

members of parliament are designated in Turkey. They were (and are) expected to represent the nation and not the constituencies from which they were elected.

Under the 1924 constitution, parliament passed laws and there was no upper house to review these laws or a constitutional court to assess their constitutionality. The president alone had the veto to suspend laws, but he was too intimately associated with the governing party to act independently. Without a strong opposition party, the government could do as it pleased, providing it could keep its own party in line. That became Menderes's principal concern after 1954, for his political problems stemmed largely from within his own party.

DP liberals, who supported free enterprise and political liberalism, came out strongly against the government's policy of state controls over the economy and curbs on political activity. Such liberal Democrats either resigned or were expelled from the party. They included such prominent democrats as Fevzi Lütüf Karaosmanoğlu, who formed the Freedom Party in December 1955. Menderes became totally dependent on his parliamentary group and agreed to the resignation of his cabinet while he alone remained to form a new cabinet. In agreeing to this political manoeuvre, parliament confessed that there was no one else in the party able to lead the government or keep the party together. Thereafter, Menderes treated his parliamentary group with great humility and respect.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

The downturn in the economy after 1955 began to have an impact on Turkey's political life. Unfortunately, the economic miracle of the early fifties was based on flimsy foundations and was therefore doomed to collapse. Food and cotton production was based, not on improved agricultural techniques, but on an increase of acreage in cultivation. By 1954, the economy began to show signs of stagnation and the growth rate began to drop. The years 1956–9 were marked by spiralling inflation, with prices rising at 18 per cent per annum. Meanwhile the growth rate of the economy had levelled out to a mediocre 4 per cent, barely enough to keep up with the high birth rate. The economy had seen artificial growth and no

sign of development that became self-sustaining. The constantly rising inflation undermined the living standards of salary and wage earners. Military officers were directly affected and resented the loss of prestige their profession suffered as a result of the decline in their living standard. They complained that they were no longer able to marry into middle-class families because such families preferred to give their daughters to the emerging business class. That had grave political consequences and was one of the factors that led to the military coup d'état in 1960.

There was also a great shortage of foreign exchange, thanks to the government's policy of over-pricing the Turkish lira. Until the devaluation of 1958, the lira was kept at 2.8 liras to the dollar, while its real value was around ten liras. As a result, imports were subsidized by the government and were very cheap, while exports were prohibitively expensive. This policy encouraged corruption on a large scale; if a businessman had political patronage he was able to acquire foreign exchange cheaply and make a small fortune. Fortunes were made during this period, but the treasury was left bankrupt.

We don't know how the Democrats would have fared had elections been held in 1958 when they were due. Realizing that the economy would have been in worse shape in 1958, Menderes decided to call them early, in October 1957. Even so, the election marked the decline of the DP, with Republican seats increasing from 31 to 178. The Democrats were still very much in command, though they were forced to pursue a more populist policy, with the exploitation of religion for political ends. That was especially true after Menderes survived the air crash at Gatwick in London on 17 February 1959. Menderes's supporters exploited his survival as a miracle (fourteen others were killed) and he was seen as a man of destiny, chosen by God to serve a higher purpose.

By the time of the 1957 election, the Democrats no longer controlled the economy. Menderes believed that he faced only a short-term problem and that all he needed was time before his policies showed results. He turned to the West to seek help and in July 1958, Washington agreed to provide a loan of US \$359 million in order to consolidate Turkey's US \$400 million debt. In return, Menderes agreed to 'stabilize' the economy by devaluing the Turkish lira from 2.8 to 9.025 liras to the US dollar. The stabilization

programme did not have the desired effect, so in October 1959, Menderes went to America to seek more financial loans. But the Eisenhower administration refused to bail him out and Menderes returned empty-handed. He then decided to visit the Soviet Union in July 1960, to see if the cold war enemy would be more forthcoming with a loan. But he had decided late in the day to repair fences with Moscow; before any such visit could take place, Menderes was overthrown by his army.

THE ARMY ENTERS THE FRAY

Political tension had mounted after the 1957 election. The opposition was much stronger and had issues it could exploit against the government, but it lacked the means to bring down Menderes except by defeat in the general election. Menderes tried to bolster his authority by forming a nationwide front called the ‘Fatherland Front’, whose aim was to isolate his critics and disarm the opposition. Those who refused to join the front were denounced as ‘subversives’ and their names were broadcast in the media. Instead of bringing unity, the ‘Fatherland Front’ polarized political life. When this political manoeuvre failed to quell the opposition, the Democrats set up a committee, in April 1960, to investigate the opposition’s ‘subversive activities’, whose aim, they claimed, was to engineer a military revolt. In Ankara, there were student protests, which spread to other parts of the country. Martial law was declared but to no avail; finally, on 24 May, Menderes declared that the investigating committee had completed its work and that he would hold early elections in September. But Menderes’s declarations came too late. Groups of military officers, alienated from DP rule, had been conspiring since 1957 to bring about its end. They intervened on 27 May and dismissed the DP government.

Reform of Turkey’s armed forces had been an important plank in the DP’s programme. With the declaration of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, the Pentagon had begun to provide modern weapons to an army that was still equipped with First World War vintage arms. Modernization was accelerated when Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952, and Menderes seemed to favour military reform when he appointed retired Colonel Seyfi Kurtbek as minister of national defence to carry out the necessary

reorganization. The Kurtbek reorganization plan was popular with younger officers, but not with the generals, who feared early retirement as they were considered incapable of mastering the new techniques of modern warfare. A hierarchical army, still Prussian in its attitudes, resented sharing power with junior officers. They came out in opposition to the reforms and spread rumours that Kurtbek was planning a military coup. Menderes responded by postponing the reforms and Kurtbek decided to resign in July 1953, realizing that his programme had been shelved.

For Menderes, reorganization of Turkey's armed forces was not a priority. He was happy to maintain the status quo and not challenge his top brass. He decided to win over some of the important generals to the party, one of the most prominent being General Nuri Yamut who had made his reputation in Korea and was well-known to the Pentagon. While such senior officers sided with the Democrats, Menderes felt secure from any threat from pro-İnönü generals.

Money for the armed forces was not on the Democrats' list of priorities; Menderes preferred to spend Turkey's limited resources on building the country's infrastructure, its roads and factories, in order to accelerate economic development. The country was already spending more in relation to its national income than most other NATO allies. Military expenditure had already risen substantially from US \$248 million in 1950 to US \$381 million in 1953, an increase of 54 per cent, and this figure kept growing throughout the 1950s. The Turks thought that the country's military expenditure would fall once they were members of NATO, for the alliance would subsidize Turkey's armed forces. That did not prove to be the case, and Menderes had no intention of spending more money from the budget to increase military salaries so that they would keep up with the spiralling inflation. Expenditure on military reform would have to wait until the economy generated a larger surplus.

Once Turkey joined NATO, not only did it spend more resources on the military, but the very character of its armed forces changed dramatically. The officers were exposed to new technology and methods of warfare, and ideologically they became more cosmopolitan, abandoning parochial nationalism in favour of Cold War anti-communism. They were sent for training to other

NATO countries, where the way of life was totally different from the one at home. They acquired a new world view and a desire to reform Turkey. They became politicized and resented the political strife in their midst. Membership of NATO also intensified the division within the officer corps, along both technological and political lines. The Democrats managed to co-opt the generals so thoroughly that the conspirators had difficulty in recruiting a full general to lead their conspiracy. Turkey's armed forces in the fifties had become divided along lines of rank and economic status.

Disaffection among the officers was triggered in the mid-fifties by the spiralling inflation, political instability, and a general sense of discontent in urban areas. Being mainly from the lower middle class, they shared the grievances of that class, whose position in society was being rapidly eroded by the free-market philosophy of the governing party. Such people deplored what they perceived as the erosion of moral, traditional values that had made the Turkish people what they were. The Democrats were undermining these values in favour of crass materialism that glorified wealth and ostentation. That is how Orhan Erkanlı, a radical member of the 1960 junta, expressed himself soon after the coup:

The clique in power after 1954 trampled on all the rights of the people. They deceived the nation and dragged the country into economic and social ruin. Moral values were forgotten and people were made oblivious of them. The institution of the state was transformed into an appendage of the party organization. The pride of the Turkish armed forces, which are the only organized force in the country, was hurt on every occasion; the uniform which is the real legacy of our history brought shame to those who wore it. (*Cumhuriyet*, 20 July 1960)

Discontent in the armed forces took a political form, reflecting the inter-party struggle of those years. The officers came to see the problems of Turkey in the way they were articulated by the Republican opposition and the press. The solutions that were acceptable to them after they seized power were also borrowed from the intelligentsia that supported the opposition. Only a few officers with a radical bent, men like Alparslan Türkeş and Orhan Erkanlı, had an agenda for taking Turkey in a direction different from the one envisaged by the elite. These people may well have been influenced by what they were witnessing in such neighbouring

countries as Nasser's Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan – all under military rule in 1960. But in Turkey, the hierarchy was well established in the armed forces and the radicals were soon marginalized by the senior officers. Henceforth it was they who established the political agenda for Turkey for the rest of the twentieth century.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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