

## Politics and political parties in Republican Turkey

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In the transition from a multinational empire to a nation-state, political life in the new Turkey experienced a radical transformation. There is still heated debate among scholars as to whether there was continuity or change in the Republic's political life. Some have argued in favour of continuity, claiming that the architects of the Republic belonged to cadres who had acquired their experience of politics after 1908. That is true, though the transitions from empire to nation-state, from monarchy to republic, from theocracy to a laicist/secular state and society, seem sufficient reasons to strengthen the claims for change, even for revolutionary change.

When war ended in total collapse in November 1918, it seemed doubtful that a viable Turkish state would emerge from the ruins. The territory left to the Ottomans by the armistice of 1918, which the nationalists then claimed as the borders of the new Turkey, was also contested by Greece and Armenian nationalists, as well as by Britain and France. Thus before there could be any political life, the Turks had to salvage a new state from the ruins of empire, and that took almost five years of war and diplomacy to achieve. During these years the Turkish elites were divided. The sultan's supporters relied on diplomacy and the goodwill of Britain for their very survival. But Britain had its own post-war agenda and did not support Istanbul's aspirations. As a result, the sultan was left with a truncated state by virtue of the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, which he was forced to sign on 10 August 1920. The sultan justified his total surrender, declaring to his privy council that a weak existence is preferable to total annihilation.

Nationalist forces under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal refused to accept the terms of treaty and continued to fight the Greek invasion of Anatolia that had begun in May 1919. While they fought the Greek army in the west and Armenian nationalists in the east, the nationalists presented a united front. But cracks began to appear in their ranks as soon as victory was in sight. However, in August 1921, when faced with defeat, the assembly appointed Mustafa

Kemal commander-in-chief and even allowed him to exercise authority over the assembly in military matters. After winning the battle of Sakarya in September, he became the dominant force in the national movement. Had the nationalists been defeated at Sakarya, leadership might well have passed to another successful general, possibly the conservative nationalist Kazım Karabekir. But for the moment, Mustafa Kemal was triumphant and the National Assembly bestowed upon him the title *Gazi* (warrior in the holy war or *jihād*).

Now that their Greek clients had lost the war, the Allies hoped to divide the nationalists by inviting both the sultan in Istanbul and the assembly in Ankara to send delegations to Lausanne to negotiate peace. But the Ankara assembly claimed that it was the only legitimate authority, Istanbul having lost any claim to legitimacy when it collaborated with the Allies. General Refet Bele, a prominent nationalist who sought to maintain the monarchy, advised the sultan to dismiss the ‘phantom government’ of Istanbul and recognise Ankara. But Vahdeddin refused. In November, the assembly abolished the sultanate, claiming that the sultan’s government had ceased to exist on 16 March 1920 when the Allies had occupied his capital. Thenceforth Istanbul was to be governed as a province from Ankara. Having lost all authority, Sultan Vahdeddin fled his capital on 17 November aboard a British battleship. Next day, the assembly, where the radical nationalists declared that sovereignty resided, elected Abdülmecit caliph.

The opposition objected to the assembly exercising such direct authority and claimed that there was no precedent for such practice. Mustafa Kemal responded to this criticism in a speech in which he argued that ‘we are unique’ (*‘Biz bize benzeriz’*) and had no need to copy other models of government. The opposition then attempted to disqualify Mustafa Kemal’s membership of the assembly by proposing a law that required five years residence in Anatolia in order to be elected to the assembly. Mustafa Kemal pointed out that his military career had not permitted such residence anywhere, and the proposal was withdrawn. He saw the strength and determination of the opposition and decided to fight back. He announced to the press that he would form the People’s Party as the vehicle to wage the political struggle. After touring Anatolia and testing the pulse of the country, Mustafa Kemal announced the party’s formation in April 1923.<sup>1</sup>

1 On the founding of the party and its history until 1950, see Mete Tunçay, ‘Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (1923–1950)’, in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. VIII (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002); Kemal Karpat, ‘Republican People’s Party, 1923–1945’, in Metin Heper and Jacob M. Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1991).

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kemal took measures to weaken the opposition in Istanbul. When Ankara was declared the capital of Turkey in October 1923, Istanbul was marginalised from political life. The declaration of the Republic on 29 October 1923 and Mustafa Kemal's election as its president also caught the opposition off guard as its prominent leaders – Rauf, Refet, Adnan and Ali Fuad – were out of Ankara. By proclaiming a republic, the Kemalists not only weakened the caliph's supporters who wanted the office of president to go to him, but they proclaimed their commitment to modernity and equality, rather than the modernisation and patriarchal hierarchy of the old order. The Kemalists had rejected hierarchy and tradition, the foundations on which the old order had rested and which the conservative nationalists, who went on to form the Progressive Republican Party, wished to maintain.

The offensive against the opposition continued with the arrival of an independence tribunal in Istanbul to deal with dissidents. Prominent members of the opposition were arrested soon after the Istanbul press published the letter of two prominent, pro-British Indian Muslims – the Agha Khan and Ameer Ali – appealing to the government to retain the caliphate. In December 1923, the assembly passed a law that ended whatever military support there was for the opposition; officers were given the choice between their military careers and politics, and officers on active service were barred from being deputies. The opposition wanted Mustafa Kemal to leave the People's Party and become an above-party president. But he rejected both suggestions and declared that conditions in the country were not ripe for more than one party.<sup>2</sup>

For some time there were rumours that the opposition was about to found a party to be called the Progressive Republican Party. The People's Party responded by adding 'Republican' to its own name, becoming the RPP. The Progressive Republican Party (PRP) was founded on 17 November and its programme was published the next day.<sup>3</sup> As a gesture to the opposition, Mustafa Kemal replaced İsmet Paşa as prime minister with Ali Fethi, a figure more acceptable to the opposition. But tension between the parties continued until the outbreak of Şeyh Said rebellion among the Kurdish tribes in February 1925. The government declared martial law and Prime Minister Fethi Bey asked the opposition to dissolve their party. But General Kazım Karabekir refused, claiming there was no reason to do so. In March the assembly passed the Maintenance of Order Law (*Takrir-i Sukun Kanunu*) and restored the

2 Erik Zürcher, *Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 42–3, citing Mustafa Kemal's speeches in Trabzon and Samsun on 18 and 29 September 1924 respectively.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 55ff.

independence tribunals. For the moment all further political activity in the country was frozen. The opposition press was closed down along with those of the nascent left and in June 1925 the government finally ordered the disbandment of the PRP.

Having crushed the Kurdish rebellion and free of all opposition, the Kemalist regime was able to implement policies that destroyed the social foundations of the old order and established those of the new one. In its 1923 regulation the party spoke of exercising national sovereignty in a democratic manner and of modernising society. Now that the government was in a position to carry out reforms, Mustafa Kemal declared: 'Gentlemen . . . the Republic of Turkey cannot be a country of Sheikhs, dervishes, disciples, and followers. The most correct and truest path is the path of civilization.'<sup>4</sup> During the next four years, until the Law for the Maintenance of Order was repealed in March 1929, the legal structure of the country was transformed: women were given rights they had never enjoyed in the past and religion was brought under the state's control so that it could not be manipulated for political ends by opponents of the regime.

There were protests against the reforms and the opposition was driven underground. The institutions associated with the sufi mystical orders (*tarikats*) may have been destroyed, but their tradition remained strong, even while it was dormant. They reasserted themselves after 1950 and have continued to play a critical political role thereafter. The Kemalists were aware of the existence of opposition and tried to defuse it by promoting a friendly opposition party in the legislature. Therefore in August 1930, Mustafa Kemal announced that Ali Fethi (Okyar), his close associate, had been permitted to found an opposition party, the Free Republican Party. However, such was the people's discontent with the regime, exhibited by popular demonstration on behalf of the new party, that the RPP felt threatened. The government resorted to fraud and vote rigging in the local elections and the Free Party protested but to no avail. Unable to obtain any satisfaction from the RPP, Fethi Bey dissolved his party and thus ended the brief experiment with multi-party politics.<sup>5</sup>

The Free Party episode alarmed the ruling party by exposing the strength of conservative forces opposed to the iconoclastic reforms. But the incident in Menemen (23 December 1930), a small town in the most advanced region of western Anatolia, shook the regime to its foundations. Supporters of the old order, led by a Naqshbandi Shaykh, demanded the restoration of the caliphate

<sup>4</sup> Speech in Kastamonu, 28 August 1925, *Söylev ve Demeçleri* 2 (1959), p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> See Walter Weiker, *Political Tutelage and Democracy in Turkey: The Free Party and its Aftermath* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); and Tevfik Çavdar, 'Serbest Fırka', in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. VIII.

and the *şeriat*. They even beheaded a reserve officer who had been sent to investigate. The government realised that the reforms had not taken root and had to be explained to the people with an ideology and appropriate institutions. The RPP decided to do just that.<sup>6</sup>

In his speech before the RPP's Izmir congress (28 January 1931), Mustafa Kemal redefined his party. He noted that political parties could be founded for a specific and limited purpose; for example, the merchants of Izmir could found a party that would meet their own interests or farmers could form their own party. 'However, our party has not been founded for such a limited purpose. On the contrary, it is a body designed to meet the interests of every class equitably without undermining those of any other.'<sup>7</sup> Along with this above-class policy, the RPP also began to disband organisations outside party control. Thus the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), an independent nationalist body, was disbanded in April 1931 and soon after replaced with the party-run People's Houses (*Halkevleri*). Their goal was to spread modern culture and civilisation throughout Turkey, as well as to explain Kemalist ideology now defined by its six principles of republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, revolutionism/reformism and laicism. The process of fusing party and state into a mono-party system was completed by 1935 at the party's fourth congress.<sup>8</sup> Though the mono-party trend was undoubtedly influenced by events in the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, Mustafa Kemal, Atatürk after 1934, supported the state's supremacy only because it seemed more efficient than the 'chaos' prevailing in the democracies. The nationalist press even reported that Franklin D. Roosevelt's America favoured state intervention in order to cope with the situation created by the world crisis. However, Atatürk continued to support a mixed economy against the hardline statist; in 1932 he backed the Business Bank (*İş Bankası*) group, replacing the statist minister of the economy, Mustafa Şeref (Özkan), with Celal Bayar, founder of Business Bank. Atatürk removed Recep Peker as the RPP's general secretary in June 1936 and prevented him from carrying out measures to reorganise and further strengthen the party.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile an amnesty law passed on the tenth anniversary of the Republic allowed opponents of the party to return from exile. While the political system

6 On the Menemen incident and the regime's reaction see Kemal Üstün, *Menemen olayı ve Kubilay* (Istanbul: Çağdaş, 1981).

7 *Cumhuriyet*, 29 December, 1931; see also C. H. Dodd, 'Atatürk and political parties', in Heper and Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*.

8 Tunçay, 'Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi', p. 2021.

9 *Ibid.*

was being liberalised, paradoxically the state was being strengthened with such measures as the abolition of Turkish Masonic Society and restrictions against the operation of foreign organisations in Turkey. Finally, in November 1938, Celal Bayar replaced İsmet İnönü both as prime minister and deputy party leader, suggesting that the statist faction was being marginalised. That might have been the case had Atatürk lived longer to consolidate the process. But immediately after his death on 10 November 1938, the assembly elected İsmet İnönü president of Turkey and the statist faction was once again firmly in the saddle. Bayar was allowed to remain prime minister until January 1939 when he was replaced by Refik Saydam.<sup>10</sup>

Faced with a threatening world crisis that led to the Second World War, İnönü decided to reconcile Atatürk's opponents with the regime and pursue a policy of moderation. Thus at the fifth party congress in May 1939 he announced the end of the party's control over the bureaucracy; provincial governors would no longer head local party organisations, nor would the secretary general be minister of the interior. Within the assembly a faction called the Independent Group was set up to act as the loyal opposition.<sup>11</sup> In the general election of March 1939 the process of consensus building continued, and such close associates of Atatürk as Şükrü Kaya and Kılıç Ali were left out while former rivals and critics – Kazım Karabekir, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, Refet Bele and Ali Fuad Cebesoy – were brought into the assembly.

Politics during the war undermined the consensus upon which the RPP's dominance had rested. Until the war the two sectors – the state and the private – had grown side by side. But the private sector expanded rapidly during the war. Economic growth and the new sense of confidence made the state's paternalism more difficult to bear. The National Defence Law of 1940 gave the state extensive power over the economy as well as over the rights of citizens, while the Capital Tax of 1942 (*Varlık Vergisi*) attempted to destroy the non-Muslim bourgeoisie by impoverishing it. Both laws showed how arbitrary, unpredictable and unaccountable the state could be, even though its measures were designed to benefit the Muslim bourgeoisie. This situation could be remedied only if the state was made accountable so that the rising bourgeoisie would feel secure. But that could happen only once the war was over.

<sup>10</sup> At the extraordinary congress of the RPP Atatürk was declared 'the Party's founder and its eternal leader' while İnönü became its 'permanent national chief' (*millî şef*). See Kemal Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-party System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Çetin Yetkin, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti Yönetimi 1930-1945* (Istanbul: Altın Kitaplar Yayınevi, 1983), pp. 178-81, İnönü's speech of 29 May 1939.

The statist wing of the party also understood that post-war changes were under way and had to be taken into account if the party was to remain relevant. They wanted to transform Turkey by implementing land reform and creating a prosperous landholding peasantry instead of a feudal landlord class. The government saw the land reform bill as a 'genuinely revolutionary law'.<sup>12</sup> But the bourgeoisie and the landlords wanted a free-market economy, an independent landed class and integration with the West. They responded by supporting the opposition within the party.

On 7 June 1945, four dissident members of the RPP wrote a memorandum demanding political liberalisation. They proposed that the government implement fully the principle of national sovereignty as stated in the constitution and that party business be carried out in accordance with the principles of democracy. The four were Celal Bayar, a banker and close associate of Atatürk; Adnan Menderes, a prominent landowner from the Aegean region; Fuad Köprülü, a historian and professor of Turcology; and Refik Koraltan, a seasoned bureaucrat. President İnönü's response was not immediate. But in his speech of 1 November, he hinted that he was prepared to make major adjustments to the political system and to bring it in line with the changed circumstances in the world, a reference to the victory of the democracies over fascism. The main deficiency in the Turkish system, he noted, was the lack of an opposition party and he indicated that he was now prepared to allow the formation of such a body. There were rumours in the press that Bayar and his friends were about to form such a party; these rumours were confirmed when the formation of the Democrat Party (DP) was officially announced on 7 January 1946.<sup>13</sup>

Once the opposition became active, multi-party, mass politics soon replaced the politics of elites of the single-party period. The centre of political life also shifted from the cities to the provinces largely untouched by Kemalist reforms or modern secular culture. That explains the growing role of Islam after 1945, and both the RPP and the DP facilitated the Islamic resurgence, as any party would have done, so as to compete successfully in the new political climate.

12 That was the description of Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu. See *Aydın Tarihi* (Ankara: Basın Genel Direktörlüğü, June 1945), pp. 35–47.

13 Karpat, *Turkey's Politics*, remains the most comprehensive book on the transitional years 1945–50. But see also B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 294 ff.; and Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish experiment in Democracy, 1950–1975* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977) pp. 1–34. Dankwart Rustow, 'Political parties in Turkey: An overview' in Heper and Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*, p. 21, n.2, notes that between 1945 and 1952 thirty political parties were founded, but only the DP was of any consequence.



Despite some hostility to the new party in RPP circles, there was no sense of alarm at the advent of the opposition party. After all, its leaders were all Kemalists of long standing who espoused the same basic philosophy as their opponents, with only a difference in emphasis. Celal Bayar liked to use the metaphor of the two parties resembling two cooks preparing the same dish, but he said that his party had the better recipe for Turkey's development. The RPP leadership expected the DP to behave as the Free Party and done in 1930 and the Independent Group during the war, as a token opposition that would never question the legitimacy of the government. The public therefore saw the new party as a means to deflect popular hostility against the government rather than offering a genuine alternative. The Democrats seemed to be serving that very function, as their programme hardly differed from that of the RPP. They adopted the 'six Kemalist principles', as required by the constitution, but declared that they would interpret them according to the needs of the times rather than dogmatically. Their main aim was to advance democracy by curbing government intervention and increasing the rights and freedoms of the individual. They emphasised populism and popular sovereignty and wanted political initiative to come from the people and not from the party. The Democrats soon became the spokesmen for private enterprise and individual initiative, which won them the support of the businessmen, the intelligentsia and the voting public.

The Republicans had transformed the country by reforming its legal and institutional structure. But most of the people had gained little, though their expectations had risen sharply. They had suffered under the wartime regime that was imposed upon them, marked by widespread corruption and the rule of the gendarme. They especially resented the policy of laicism/secularism, and never understood how they had benefited from it. It was all very well for the RPP to claim that what was being done was 'for the people', but why was it being done 'in spite of the people', as the party's slogan had it?

Between 1946 and 1950, the two parties acquired new identities designed to appeal to the electorate. İnönü reinvented his party by giving it a liberal face, declaring that he was no longer the 'National Chief' or the 'Permanent Chairman'. He decided to hold an early general election before the DP was able to organise, but the Democrats refused to participate in any election until the laws had been democratised. The government therefore made further concessions, amended the electoral law to allow direct elections instead of a two-tier ballot through electoral colleges, granted the universities administrative autonomy and liberalised the press laws. The RPP also abolished the law proscribing associations with the purpose of propagating class distinction,



class interest and regionalism.<sup>14</sup> Republican radicals wanted to make the RPP a 'class party' and win the support of peasants, workers, tenant farmers, artisans and small merchants, at the same time isolating the Democrats as the party of landlords and big business. However, the party's moderates prevailed and the RPP continued to oppose class struggle, seeking instead a balance among the classes.

Despite the reforms, the RPP failed to placate any constituency other than its traditional supporters. The Democrats exploited this popular antagonism towards government by emphasising its arbitrary character and promising to end the hated rule of the gendarmerie and the bureaucracy. They became the party of the masses by constantly attacking 'the tyranny of the state'. Voters were convinced that by bringing the Democrats to power they would free themselves of an oppressive state and improve their material lot as well. Having lost the 1946 election, the Democrats realised that they could come to power only in a fair and honest election in which the bureaucracy remained neutral. They began to prepare the ground for that by winning over the bureaucracy.

The world conjuncture – the triumph of the democracies and the free-market system, the beginning of the Cold War – seemed to favour the Democrats. But President İnönü also understood the trend and supported his party's moderate faction against the statist. On 12 July 1947 he abandoned the single-party option for Turkey and gave the opposition total freedom of action and equality with the RPP.<sup>15</sup> He met the DP's challenge by adopting free-market policies and opening up Turkey's economy. He was convinced that Turkey's future was best served by market rather than state capitalism and that foreign investment on a grand scale was vital for rapid economic growth. If foreign investment could be attracted by political stability and multi-party politics, he was willing to take that path. The lira was devalued, import regulations were eased and banks were permitted to sell their gold reserves. The result of the '7 September measures' was to begin an inflationary trend that pleased local and foreign businesses but alienated the masses. İnönü, the devout secularist, began to make concessions on that front as well. Religious concessions were considered of prime importance to isolate the Democrats as well as the Nation Party, which had been formed in 1948 by conservative dissidents in the DP. Therefore religious instruction was permitted in schools and other concessions followed. Finally in January 1949 Şemsettin Günaltay, a professor of history and a man with Islamist sympathies, was appointed prime minister.

<sup>14</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Karpat, *Turkey's Politics*, p. 169.

The political initiative seemed to have passed to the Republicans. Over the years the RPP had taken on so much of its rival's colouring that it was difficult to tell them apart. The programmes of the two parties hardly differed. Both spoke of an anti-Soviet/communist bipartisan foreign policy that supported the West in the Cold War. As early as June 1946 the left-wing Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party had been closed down and in 1948 leftist influence was liquidated in Ankara University by the purge of its faculty.

İnönü was confident of success in the general election of 14 May 1950. But he forgot that he personally symbolised the past, and voters were convinced that nothing would really change while he was at the helm. Moreover, the DP had neutralised the bureaucracy by holding the RPP, and not the state, responsible for past misdeeds. Had the bureaucracy remained hostile, the DP's electoral victory would have been uncertain. In a society dominated by the concept of an all-powerful state, the influence of the official in political life was, and still remains, overwhelming.

The May 1950 election results came as a great surprise: the voters delivered a shattering defeat to the RPP, giving the DP 53.35 per cent of the vote and 408 seats while the RPP won a respectable 38.38 per cent but only 39 parliamentary seats. Such was the verdict of the winner-take-all system used at the time. As late as 1954, İnönü described his party's defeat as the 'ingratitude' of the voter.<sup>16</sup> Rarely had a ruling party given up its power at the polls.

The DP victory was a radical turning point in Turkey's political landscape: power had passed into the hands of new elites and away from the old civil-military bureaucracy. Roles were reversed as the DP became the governing party and the RPP went into opposition, creating an identity crisis difficult to adjust to. Had the political culture of Turkey matured sufficiently, İsmet İnönü, the leader of a defeated party, would have retired and allowed a new leadership appropriate to the times to emerge. But the RPP had become 'İnönü's party' and there was a fear that it would fragment if he retired. For their part, the Democrats believed that the people had given them the mandate – what they described as the national will (*milli irade*) – to run the country according to their programme and that the opposition was duty bound to let them do so.

In power the DP leaders were faced with a dilemma: they had promised to destroy the single-party system once they assumed office. But in office they were forced to work with the institutions established by the single-party regime – the constitution, the bureaucracy, the army, in short the entire state

<sup>16</sup> İnönü's comment to Dankwart Rustow was: 'I never expected to see so much ingratitude', quoted in his 'Political parties in Turkey', p. 22, n.12.

structure – as well as with the RPP itself. The government wanted to work within the inherited system and to transform the country. The party's rank and file, on the other hand, pressured the government to destroy the institutions of the old regime as rapidly as possible. İnönü was a constant reminder of the past and became a factor – the 'Paşa factor' – in Turkey's political life throughout the 1950s. The Democrats feared that state institutions, especially the army, continued to be loyal to him because of the historic role he had played in the founding of the Republic. The Democrats countered this fear by leaning on their electoral victories in 1950 and 1954 and the 'national will', which they believed gave them the right to monopolise all state institutions with total disregard for the opposition. Such was the mono-party mentality exercised during the multi-party period.<sup>17</sup>

Even before the general election of May 1954, relations between the parties deteriorated dramatically. The government declared war on the RPP, confiscating the party's assets not indispensable for the continuation of its activities. Laws were passed to strengthen its position in the country by curbing all possible criticism; for example, a law forbade university faculties from participating in the country's politics. Only a sense of insecurity accounts for the anti-opposition measures taken by Prime Minister Menderes. Given the government's economic record, electoral victory in 1954 seemed assured without any repressive measures. Good harvests, foreign credit and investments in public works, especially road construction, gave an air of growing prosperity the opposition could hardly contradict. On 2 May 1954 the voters delivered their verdict with a massive victory for the DP with 57 per cent of the vote and 504 seats, while the RPP's share of the vote declined to 35 per cent with only 31 seats.<sup>18</sup>

Adnan Menderes was transformed by the result. The transition period of 1950–4 was over; he now expected all opposition to bend to the 'national will' or he threatened to break it. In the process he alienated both the universities and the press, the bastions of Turkey's intelligentsia. With a huge majority in parliament, only the party could rein him in. The Istanbul anti-Greek riots of 6–7 September 1955 led to dissension in the party and forced the interior minister to resign on 10 September. Even Menderes's position was shaken and

<sup>17</sup> See Ahmad, *Experiment*, in which chapters 2, 3, and 5 are devoted to the DP era, while chapter 4 discusses the RPP in opposition. See also Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, 'The Democratic Party, 1946–1960' in Heper and Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*. Samet Ağaoğlu, *Demokrat Partinin doğuş ve yükseliş sebepleri bir soru* (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1972) provides an insider's view.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad, *Experiment*, pp. 50–1.

he considered resigning. As there was no other leader willing to replace him, his cabinet resigned instead and the assembly gave him a vote of confidence, abandoning the principle of cabinet responsibility! Academics who had supported the DP gave up hope of reform from within the party. They broke away in December 1955 and formed the Freedom Party (FP, *Hürriyet Partisi*). The DP had become 'Menderes's party' and there was no one of any stature to challenge him.

The opposition was in disarray. The RPP was the only party with a national following. But during its years in opposition it failed to offer any alternative to the DP, shed its image as an authoritarian party or win the public's confidence. The Freedom Party, though it became a significant opposition with thirty-two members in the assembly, lacked national organisation to transform itself into an effective opposition. Thus when Menderes announced that an early general election was to be held on 27 October 1957, the three opposition parties – the RPP, the FP and the Republican Nation Party (RNP) – failed to agree on any formula for cooperation, blaming İnönü for the failure.

Though the Democrats won the 1957 election, the turnout was lower and their vote declined to below 50 per cent, losing them their right to claim the mandate of the 'national will'. They still enjoyed a substantial majority in parliament with 424 seats as compared to 178 Republican seats and only 4 each for the FP and RNP. The opposition became more confident, questioned the election results and called for the reform of political institutions. Meanwhile the economy stagnated with high inflation. Under Western pressure, Menderes was forced to introduce a stabilisation programme in August 1958, devaluing the Turkish lira from 2.80 to 9.025 to the US dollar.

Because of the deteriorating economic situation and rising social tensions, the country began to experience popular unrest against the government. There were student demonstrations encouraged by the opposition and troops were called in to quell them. In January 1958 there were rumours of a military conspiracy marked by the arrest of nine officers. But the government was unable to uncover a plot despite a long investigation. The government had lost control over virtually the entire state apparatus – the armed forces, the bureaucracy, the universities and the press. The July 1958 military coup and the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq had a detrimental effect on political life in Turkey. As a result the Democrats become more truculent and began calling for measures against the opposition, accusing it of engaging in 'subversive activities'.

Prime Minister Menderes spoke of curtailing democracy if the RPP did not desist from its negative policies, but the RPP refused to be intimidated. On

12 October 1958 the Democrats called for the creation of a 'Fatherland Front' in order to counter what they described as the RPP's 'front of malice and hostility'. The Republicans had become more confident after the 1957 election and harassed the government at every opportunity. The decision of the FP to dissolve itself and merge with the Republicans added to their confidence. Moreover, the RPP had begun to acquire a new image by focusing on the country's concern with growing economic inequality and social justice. The party began to call for constitutional and institutional reforms, reforms they themselves had failed to carry out during their long years in power.

After Menderes survived a crash at London's Gatwick airport in February 1959 the government began to exploit a cult of personality. The tragic crash took the lives of fourteen of his entourage who had come to resolve the crisis in Cyprus. But Menderes's survival was portrayed as a miracle; Islam was now used more explicitly in the political struggle against the opposition. Meanwhile, early in 1959, İnönü proposed that the government hold early elections in order to calm the situation. In April, he launched a country-wide campaign whose climax was his tour of the DP's stronghold, the Aegean region where the İnönü party was attacked and he was struck by a stone. The RPP exploited the incident and walked out of the assembly when the DP majority refused to discuss, let alone investigate, the incident.

Political life was polarised and there seemed no common ground between the parties. The RPP kept demanding an early election while DP hardliners called for the disbandment of the RPP. Any possibility of an early election was ruled out on 1 March when the government passed the 1960 budget and political calculations based on an early poll were upset; the RPP declared that 'it was now impossible for the two parties to overcome their differences'.<sup>19</sup>

The political situation continued to deteriorate with neither side willing to compromise. On 18 April 1960 the government established a committee of Democrats to investigate whether the RPP had transgressed the legal limits of opposition. The committee was given extraordinary powers superseding those of the assembly and the courts. It recommended the suspension of all political activity for three months as well as a press blackout on its investigation. As though that was not sufficient, on 27 April the government gave the committee further powers to control the press, to issue subpoenas and even to imprison anyone who hampered the investigation.

The committee sparked off a demonstration in the capital on 19 April and law professors denounced these measures as unconstitutional. In assembly

<sup>19</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 12 March 1960.

debates that followed, İsmet İnönü was suspended for twelve sessions for inciting the people to revolt and resist the law, attacking the Turkish nation and army and the integrity of the assembly.<sup>20</sup> The opposition responded by using its youth organisation to demonstrate in Ankara and Istanbul, leading to the establishment of martial law and the closure of the universities.

By early May the situation had stabilised, largely because the demonstrations had not spread to the urban masses. But relations between the parties remained brittle and there was talk of military intervention. İnönü, hinting at the fall of Syngman Rhee in South Korea, told foreign journalists that ‘an oppressive régime can never be sure of the army’; Foreign Minister Zorlu replied that the ‘Turkish officer is fully aware that the army should not interfere in politics’.<sup>21</sup> But plans for a coup were already at an advanced stage, and though the government seemed aware of a conspiracy it could do little to prevent it. Menderes decided to shore up his position by demonstrating that he still enjoyed popular support by going before meetings throughout the country. He addressed large crowds throughout western Turkey, returning to Ankara for the 19 May Youth Day festival.

The situation seemed to be under control until the War College cadet demonstration of 21 May. The government was flustered, and responded by declaring a state of siege in the capital. Ironically, the conspirators, fearing lest an investigation of the cadets might lead to the discovery of their plot, hastened their coup. It was scheduled to take place while Menderes was visiting Greece on 25 May. But on 24 May Menderes decided to postpone the visit and set out on another tour of Anatolia. He declared that the investigating committee had completed its work and was preparing its report. He was even going to announce an early general election for June in his Konya speech, hoping that would restore political normality. But before he could do so, the conspirators arrested him on the morning of 27 May, opening a new page in Turkey’s political life.<sup>22</sup>

### Political life after 27 May 1960

Having captured political power the military junta of thirty-eight officers, calling itself the National Unity Committee (NUC), adopted the opposition’s ideas of amending the 1924 constitution and bringing Turkey’s institutions in

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad, *Experiment*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147 ff.



Fig. 9.1 President Celal Bayar inspecting troops with Cemal Gürsel [author's personal collection]

line with the requirements of the post-war world. Professor Siddik Sami Onar, the rector of Istanbul University, was invited to write a new constitution. The junta's decision to involve intellectuals transformed a military coup into an institutional revolution, a 'revolution of the intellectuals'.

The Onar Commission presented its preliminary report on 28 May and legitimised the intervention, describing how the DP had corrupted political power and lost respect for the constitution, the press, the army and the university. The commission recommended creating a totally new state and social institutions before restoring political authority and legal government to civilians. Meanwhile on 12 June 1960 the NUC set up an interim government legalised by a provisional constitution allowing the NUC to rule until a new parliament had been elected.

Broadly speaking, there were two factions in the NUC: moderates and radicals. The moderates constituted the majority representing the liberal and democratic wing that wanted to restore power to the politicians – that is to say, the RPP. The radicals, mainly junior officers under Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, wanted to retain power *sine die* so as to carry out a more thorough



institutional restructuring than that envisaged by the intellectuals. However, on 13 November the fourteen radicals were purged from the NUC, allowing the moderates to carry out their programme. On 22 February 1962 and 20/21 May 1963, frustrated junior officers and cadets led by Colonel Talat Aydemir attempted to carry out coups against the NUC. These were the last attempts at coups from below; the senior officers took counter-measures to ensure that any future military intervention was limited to the hierarchical principle.

The 1961 constitution and the new institutions such as the electoral law guaranteeing proportional representation were designed to prevent 'majoritarian democracy' of the type practised between 1950 and 1960. It was a radical departure from its predecessor. There was a bicameral parliament, with the lower house elected by proportional representation, and an upper house, the senate, consisting of 150 members, some elected by a straight majority while others were appointed by the president. The two chambers together constituted the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT). The assembly elected the president for a term of seven years from among its own members by a two-thirds majority. The cabinet was responsible to the assembly. An important innovation that frustrated future governments was the creation of the constitutional court, whose principal function was to review the constitutionality of legislation. It became one of the most important and controversial institutions, constantly under attack from politicians whose arbitrary acts it refused to sanction.<sup>23</sup>

The 1961 constitution guaranteed citizens the freedoms of thought, expression, association and publication, as well as other civil liberties, and promised 'social and economic rights . . . and the freedom of work and enterprise'. The military high command was made the guardian of the new regime. Article 111 created the National Security Council (NSC) made up of 'the Ministers provided by law, the Chief of the General Staff, and representatives of the armed forces'. Its function was to assist the cabinet 'in the making of decisions related to national security and co-ordination'. The term 'national security' was so broad and all-embracing that the generals had a say in virtually every problem that came before the cabinet. In March 1962, a bill increased the powers and influence of the NSC, allowing the body to interfere in the deliberations of the cabinet. Moreover Article 110 made the chief of staff responsible to the prime minister, not the defence minister, in the exercise of his duties and powers. The armed forces had become an autonomous institution recognised as the

23 On the new constitution and post-1960 institutions see C. H. Dodd, *Politics and Government in Turkey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), pp. 107 ff.

guardians and partners of the new order. The high command had become an integral part of the political and socio-economic life of the country.

The revolution changed the political architecture in other ways as well. Turkey now enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than ever before. Citizens had greater civil rights, and the universities greater autonomy, with students allowed to organise their own associations. Workers were given the right to strike as well. In such a political environment, some intellectuals and trade unionists organised the Workers' Party of Turkey (WPT) to represent workers and peasants.

The Democrat Party became a part of history, but its political base remained a much-sought-after prize by all the neo-Democrat parties of the centre-right. Two such parties were formed in 1961 as soon as political activity was restored. They were the Justice Party (JP), led by a retired general with close ties to the junta, and the New Turkey Party (NTP), whose leader, Ekrem Alican, had opposed Menderes and formed the Freedom Party in 1955. In the general election of October 1961, these parties won 48.5 per cent of the vote between them (34.8 and 13.7 per cent respectively) compared to the 36.7 per cent won by İnönü's RPP. The election was a tribute to the charisma of Adnan Menderes. After a public trial that was designed to humiliate him and destroy his prestige, Menderes and two ministers, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu (foreign affairs) and Hasan Polatkan (finance), had been hanged in September 1961. But he continued to exercise his authority from beyond the grave, and the election was also a vote of censure against the military regime which had ousted him. As there was no question of permitting a neo-DP coalition to form the government – that would have invited another intervention by the army – President Cemal Gürsel asked İsmet İnönü to do so.

The first coalition (10 November 1961 – 30 May 1962) was a partnership between the RPP and a reluctant JP. It lasted barely six months because of constant threats and prodding from the Armed Forces Union. The second coalition was formed with great difficulty on 25 June, and only after much bullying by the generals. It survived until December 1963. All the parties in the assembly except the JP provided ministers: that is to say the RPP the NTP and the Republican Peasants' Nation Party, plus independents. But the RPP's partners performed so badly in the local and municipal elections of November 1963 that they withdrew from the coalition, concluding that collaborating with İsmet İnönü was the kiss of death. After these elections, the JP became the most popular party in the country.

İnönü formed his last cabinet with independents on 25 December 1963, coinciding with the crisis over Cyprus and the threat of war with Greece. No

longer commanding a majority in the assembly, İnönü survived and received a vote of confidence on 3 January 1964 because some members of the opposition parties supported the government in the crisis. But throughout 1964, the opposition gave no quarter to the government, despite the country's preoccupation with Cyprus. The cabinet could have been brought down at any time. But JP's leader, Süleyman Demirel, waited for the opportune moment after his own position was more secure both in the party and with the generals. By the beginning of 1965 he was ready to assume control and decided to use the budget debate on 12 February as the occasion to force İnönü's resignation.

The fourth coalition was JP rule by proxy. It was led by Suat Hayri Ürgüplü, an independent senator elected on the JP list, and included other independents as well as ministers from the parties of the right. This government's principal task was to lead the country to the general election later in the year and restore political stability. The voters were tired of weak, ineffective governments. In the 1965 general election they therefore voted for the nearest option they had to the populist DP: Süleyman Demirel's JP.

The JP had been formed on 11 February 1961 with the blessing of the army. It is no coincidence that its leader, Ragıp Gümüşpala, was a retired general who had commanded the Third Army in May 1960. He was appointed chief of the general staff on 3 June and retired in August to emerge as the leader of the principal neo-Democrat party six months later. Gümüşpala was the army's insurance against DP revanchisme and the ex-Democrats' insurance against military pressure. His death on 5 June 1964 brought the party face to face with the crisis of leadership. All the factions put forward their candidates: the hard-line ex-Democrats nominated Said Bilgiç; those who wanted to appease the army proposed a retired air force general, Tekin Arıburun, who had also been Celal Bayar's aide-de-camp; the conservatives supported a law professor, Ali Fuad Başgil; and the middle-of-the-road moderates put forward Demirel, a relatively unknown engineer whose patron had been Adnan Menderes. Because he was the least controversial candidate, the party chose Demirel as its leader.

Süleyman Demirel epitomised the new Turkish politician who rose to the top because the junta had purged the top layer of leadership from politics. That was perhaps either the most destructive or the most constructive aspect (depending on one's political perspective) of the military intervention. An artificial political vacuum was created which sucked in people who would otherwise have remained outside politics. Demirel had been an engineer in the state's Department of Water Works and it is doubtful if he would have entered politics but for the extraordinary circumstances of the 1960s.

Within the party Demirel was seen as a technocrat ideally suited to deal with the modern world and who, in sharp contrast to Menderes, understood the workings of a complex economy. Since he lacked a political base in Isparta, his place of birth, he was considered politically weak and therefore unlikely to dominate the party. Moreover, his modest village–small-town background, which he exploited with skill, made Demirel appealing to the ‘ordinary Turk’, especially the ambitious rural migrant who had settled in the shantytowns of the major cities and who could identify with Demirel as a ‘self-made man’. Though he was not an exceptional orator, his idiom and the way he spoke made him a ‘man of the people’ while leaders like İnönü, and even the socialist Mehmed Ali Aybar, the leader of the WPT, clearly belonged to the old military–bureaucratic elite.<sup>24</sup>

Politics in the 1960s contrasted sharply with those of the previous decade. Turkey had been thoroughly politicised after 1960 and the new freedoms provided by the constitution permitted ideological politics for the first time. There was now a left-wing presence in the country, especially in the universities. Students had organised their own political associations, some affiliated to the WTP. Political literature, especially translations of left-wing writings from the West, was readily available. The isolation of Turkey came to an end and the country became more aware of the world around it. The right, alarmed by this awakening, abandoned its complacency and began to mobilise its own forces in support of what was described as ‘the struggle against communism’.

These political trends coincided with the country’s disenchantment with the United States. Throughout the 1950s Menderes had remained totally loyal to Washington and had supported US Cold War policy without question. On seizing power, the junta immediately reaffirmed Turkey’s commitments to her Western allies. During the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, Prime Minister İnönü promised to stand by Washington even if that meant facing a Soviet attack and nuclear annihilation, as it very nearly did. But during that crisis Turkey learned that she was little more than a bargaining counter in the negotiations between the superpowers and that her ally did not take her interests into account during the negotiations. Public opinion became convinced that Turkey’s interests were negotiable and that she was no longer a ‘strategic asset’ for Washington. The Cyprus crisis of 1963/4 in which Washington seemed to side with Athens – especially the Johnson letter of June 1964 – inflamed public opinion against America. There were anti-American

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–103; and Ahmad, *Experiment*, pp. 112–36.

demonstrations which continued on and off until the military takeover of 12 March 1971.<sup>25</sup>

Turkish public opinion had become so outraged by the events on the island and was so convinced of the righteousness of the Turkish cause that there was overwhelming support for military intervention. That is why the shock was so great when the country learned of President Johnson's letter of 5 June to Prime Minister İnönü forbidding intervention. Though the full text of the letter became public knowledge only much later, its contents were leaked to the press almost immediately. It seemed to confirm the claims of the nationalists who, since the Cuban missile crisis, had charged that Turkey was a pawn of the West, which had no intentions of coming to her defence if ever the need arose. The Johnson letter gave rise to virulent anti-Americanism and a clamour from nationalists and the left for a 'non-aligned Turkey'. Even the government was shaken by Johnson's bluntness and its own impotence.

Anti-Americanism became more than an issue of foreign policy; it polarised the country into two camps, which have been rather crudely defined as the pro-American right and the anti-American left. In fact, those who made up the anti-American camp included neo-Kemalist nationalists of all political stripes as well as leftists, and the two often overlapped. Such people came to see Turkey's predicament in terms of dependence on and exploitation by the capitalist West whose leader was the United States. The history of Turkey's war of liberation was reinterpreted and presented as a struggle against imperialism with the Kemalists bent on establishing an independent, non-aligned state while their opponents were willing to accept foreign tutelage.

A similar analysis was applied to post-war Turkey, and the rulers were criticised for lacking the determination to preserve the country's true independence. Both the RPP and the DP were found guilty; the former for accepting the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the latter for leading Turkey into NATO and the Baghdad Pact. However, there was no excuse for continuing these policies now that they had been exposed by recent events as being futile.

For the first time, such criticism came from outside the bureaucratic establishment and the major parties. It came mainly from the intelligentsia, especially groups of students who formed 'ideas clubs' (*fikir kulubleri*) in the universities where they discussed the problems confronting their underdeveloped society or, in their words, a society which had been 'left underdeveloped' by

<sup>25</sup> See George Harris, *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective, 1945-1971* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1972).

imperialism. These clubs were the first serious attempt to create a civil society in a country where bureaucratic control had smothered all initiative. Some of their members joined the WPT, which provided a political platform for their views. Even the RPP was influenced by these radical trends and was forced to respond by describing itself as 'left-of-centre' in order to remain politically relevant.

The right was alarmed by the appeal of this new radical nationalism which it denounced as communist. Since the neo-Kemalists had succeeded in making nationalism one of the tenets of their ideology, the right, which hitherto had monopolised nationalism, was forced to use Islam as a counterforce. New right-wing organisations such as the Association to Combat Communism were formed as early as 1962 and presented 'Islam as the antidote to communism'. This political manipulation of Islam continued to increase throughout the 1960s, especially after Saudi money became influential through the organisation known as the Union of the World of Islam or the Rabitat-ul Alem-ul Islam. But religion also became significant politically when the economic policies of import substitution marginalised an entire sector of society, parts of which, as we shall see, sought a remedy in Islamist politics.<sup>26</sup>

Demirel, whose Justice Party won the 1965 election with a majority sufficiently large to form the government, had to cope with all the new forces released by the 27 May regime. Because he spent a year in America as an Eisenhower fellow and was employed by a US multinational corporation operating in Turkey, Demirel became the symbol of modern capitalism and the link with the United States. He was therefore attacked from all sides: by the left and the neo-Kemalists, as well as the religious right, which denounced him as a Freemason. Demirel's political position deteriorated as the 1960s drew to a close. He had no solution for the frustration over the Cyprus problem which continued to fester with time, seeming to favour the Greeks. The country became more politicised, resulting in increasing anti-Americanism, especially after the US intervened in Vietnam and the 1967 war in the Middle East.

During these years, Turkey's workers became more militant and politicised by the events of the 1960s, especially by the propaganda of the WPT. Consequently, in 1967 a group of unions broke away from the pro-government confederation, Türk-İş, and formed the radical confederation DİSK (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions). The former, founded on

<sup>26</sup> Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981); Mehmet Yaşar Geyikdağı, *Political Parties in Turkey: The Role of Islam* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

the American model, concentrated on economic demands and discouraged political affiliation. The latter, following Europe's example, claimed that economic demands could be won only through political action. It therefore supported the WPT. The split resulted in defections and the weakening of Türk-İş which, despite claims to the contrary, was unofficially affiliated to the JP. The government and the employers' unions were alarmed. They saw that they were losing control of the workers' movement and decided to regain control before it was too late.

Demirel may have controlled the situation better had his own party remained united. But that was not the case, not because of any failing on his part, but because of the consequences of economic policies with which he was identified. He wanted to be the architect of a modern capitalist state and society, willing to bury old, outmoded structures in order to achieve this goal. He told the assembly: 'The path of the modern Turkish state will be totally different from the methods of nineteenth-century capitalism.' And so it was. Large-scale modern capitalist enterprises, which in some areas had the character of a monopoly, soon became dominant throughout Anatolia. A small group of capitalists, some of whom were soon to be listed among the Fortune 500 companies, took advantage of the new economic policies. But the small independent tradesmen, merchants and artisans who were scattered throughout the country failed to survive the competition.

Those who represented this traditional lower-middle class in the JP began to criticise Demirel for falling into the hands of vested interests and serving them rather than the people. They adopted Islamist rhetoric and denounced him as a Freemason, allegedly like most big businessmen and industrialists in Turkey. Demirel recognised the dilemma of these people, but he offered them no help, only advice. 'In our country', he told their delegation, 'there are a million and a half tradesmen and artisans; that means about five or six million people. Self-sufficient, experienced, knowledgeable, and skilled people are a force in the democratic order. Today's small tradesman may be tomorrow's factory owner.' But in order to rise above their predicament they were told to organise and pool their resources. However, few were either able or willing to do that; many went bankrupt.

If these people failed to heed Demirel's advice, they did begin to organise politically, supporting those who opposed Demirel and his policies. In May 1968, Professor Necmettin Erbakan, soon to found the Islamist National Order Party (NOP), attacked the government's economic policies which he said had made Turkey into 'an open market for Europe and America'. A year later, with the support of the delegates from Anatolia, Erbakan defeated Demirel's



candidate in the election for the presidency of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The JP won the general election in October 1969 but its share of the vote was reduced by 6.4 per cent. Encouraged by these results, Erbakan formed his own party in January 1970. Later in the year, in December, another faction broke away from the JP and formed the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, Colonel Türkeş, who had seized control of the Republican People's Nation Party in 1965, renamed it the Nationalist Action Party (NAP) in February 1969. His aim was to attract the same lower-middle-class vote by creating a militant, ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist party that claimed to be equally opposed to monopoly capitalism and communism. The RPP had also split soon after it adopted the left-of-centre programme in 1965. Its right wing broke away in protest and under Professor Turhan Feyzioğlu's leadership formed the Reliance Party, later the Republican Reliance Party. This fragmented right became the major factor of political instability of the 1970s.

Rising political tensions, societal changes and events around the world coalesced in the late 1960s and early 1970s to produce an explosive situation. Industrial expansion with a high rate of growth created ever-rising expectations that proved impossible to meet. High inflation restricted consumption to an affluent minority; the labour force grew but never in proportion to the demand for jobs so that unemployment was always rising, though mitigated by emigration to Europe to fuel its 'economic miracle'. At the same time workers became more militant and joined unions in increasing numbers. As in most Third World countries, Turkey's population not only increased rapidly, but the percentage of those under thirty assumed alarming proportions. The education system, already inadequate, failed to meet the needs of a growing student body while the economy failed to provide jobs to thousands of new graduates each year. Schools and institutions of higher education (universities, teachers' training colleges and schools of theology) doubled their enrolment in the 1960s and became recruiting grounds for fringe political groups of the left and right.

Murat Belge, a left-wing activist in the 1960s and an ideologue of the left, wrote that in 'the prevailing hothouse atmosphere of Turkish student politics, the dramatic events of 1968 – the Tet offensive in February, the French student rising in May, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August – had an even greater impact than in most countries'.<sup>27</sup> These events coincided with the

27 Murat Belge [Ahmet Samim], 'The left', in Irvin Schick and Ertigrul Tonak (eds.), *Turkey in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). On the WPT see Artun Ünsal, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi (1961–1971)* (Istanbul: Yurt Yayınları, 2002).

amendment of the electoral law on 1 March abolishing the 'national remainder system'. This provision of the electoral law had allowed the Workers' Party to win fourteen seats in the 1965 assembly and play an oppositional role of historic importance totally out of proportion to its size. That is why the government wanted to amend the law and remove the WPT from the political scene.

Under the amended law, the WPT would have secured only three seats for the same number of votes; in the 1969 election it won only two. Commenting on the new law, *The Economist* (9 March 1968) drew the obvious conclusion: 'Since the Turkish Communist party is banned, the Labour [i.e. Workers'] party is indeed the only legal home for extreme left-wingers. Subversion thrives in political frustration, and whether the Labour party is subversive now, it is much more likely to be tempted in that direction if its parliamentary outlet is largely stopped up.'

The WPT itself did not become subversive, though some of its supporters did. Convinced that the parliamentary road had been closed off to the left, some came to believe that the only way to power was via a military coup in partnership with sympathetic officers. The left became divided among those who continued to support the WPT and those who supported the 'National Democratic Revolution' – that is to say, an alliance with radical military officers. Others were convinced that the answer to Turkey's problems was to be found in Maoism of perhaps the Indian, Naxalite variety, or the Latin American urban guerrilla strategy.

Meanwhile, the government, having wounded the left with the election law, decided to destroy DİSK's political unionism by passing a law favouring the pro-government Türk-İş. The amended law, wrote Professor Işıklı, an expert on the Turkish union movement, 'prohibited the existence of unions unless they represented at least one third of those working in a particular workplace. Most important, however, was the explicit and public admission by government spokesmen that the amendment was going to be used to wipe DİSK out of existence.'<sup>28</sup>

The workers responded to this law by staging a vast and largely spontaneous demonstration on 15/16 June 1970 and succeeded in totally paralysing the entire Istanbul–Marmara region. This was the last straw for the regime, which described the demonstration as 'the dress rehearsal for revolution'. Observers noted the government's inability to maintain law and order with the institutions of the Second Republic and predicted another period of

<sup>28</sup> Alpaslan Işıklı, 'Wage labor and unionization', in Schick and Tonak (eds.), *Turkey in Transition*, p. 320.

military tutelage. Demirel had often complained that it was impossible to run the country with such a liberal and permissive constitution.

By January 1971, Turkey seemed to be in a state of chaos. The universities had ceased to function. Left-wing students emulating Latin American urban guerrillas robbed banks, kidnapped US servicemen and attacked American targets. Neo-fascist militants bombed the homes of university professors critical of the government. Factories were on strike and more workdays were lost between 1 January and 12 March 1971 than during any prior year.<sup>29</sup> The Islamists had become more aggressive and the NOP openly rejected Atatürk and Kemalism, infuriating the armed forces.

By the beginning of March, Demirel had been overwhelmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation which he no longer controlled. A meeting of his party's assembly group on 8 March showed that he no longer enjoyed its confidence and the generals learned of this immediately from their confidants in the JP. Two days later, they met and decided that Demirel would have to go since he no longer enjoyed the full support of his own party. Therefore on 12 March, the generals acting on behalf of the Turkish armed forces presented a memorandum to President Sunay and the chairmen of the two chambers. They demanded the formation of a strong, credible government capable of implementing reforms envisaged by the constitution. They threatened to take power if the government refused to resign, leaving Demirel with no alternative. His resignation cleared the way for the anti-democratic measures he had often called for but had been unable to take because of the guarantees provided by the 1961 constitution.

*Social democracy and political terror, 1971–80*

The generals gave priority 'to the restoration of law and order', and that meant the elimination of the political left and all its organisations such as the Workers' Party, the Federation of the Revolutionary Youth of Turkey or the Dev-Genç youth movement, the ideas clubs in the universities, branches of the Union of Teachers and DİSK. At the same time, the so-called Idealist Hearths, the youth organisation of the Nationalist Action Party, were given free rein to act as vigilantes against their ideological rivals.

The junta replaced Demirel's government with an 'above-party' cabinet of technocrats and on 19 March Professor Nihat Erim, a conservative Republican, was appointed prime minister. He was supported by the right-wing parties and, with İnönü's backing, was expected to win over the RPP. Erim failed

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

to carry out the reform programme envisaged by the junta, partly because of the fresh outbreak of terrorist violence carried out by left-wing extremists driven underground when the political left was proscribed. Martial law was declared in April in eleven provinces, including the south-east where Kurdish separatists were active. As a result political life ground to a halt and on 3 May all strikes and lockouts were declared illegal.

For the next two years, repression became the order of the day. The constitution, blamed by the right for all of Turkey's problems, was amended without public discussion so that the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1961 constitution were removed. The generals had concluded that the liberal constitution was a luxury for Turkey, a developing society. After the liberal constitution had been amended, there was talk of reform. But the right was opposed to economic reforms and Demirel therefore created a crisis by withdrawing JP ministers from the cabinet. The crisis was resolved on Demirel's terms but eleven reformist ministers, convinced that reform was dead, resigned and forced Erim to follow suit.

The second Erim cabinet (11 December 1971–17 April 1972) was also a failure. Without Demirel's support Erim could do little, and Demirel was biding his time in order to regain power at the next election. Erim therefore resigned and was succeeded by Ferit Melen, who continued to give priority to law and order rather than reform and the fundamental problems of economy and society remained untouched. But as 1973 approached, the mood in the country began to change with the promise of elections. In May 1972 Bulent Ecevit had succeeded in capturing the RPP's leadership from İsmet İnönü and began to steer the party towards social democracy. He also abandoned İnönü's policy of collaborating with the generals; instead, he and Demirel agreed not to elect General Faruk Gürler president when General Cevdet Sunay's term expired in 1973. On 6 April retired admiral Fahri Korutürk, a compromise candidate, was elected president. When Melen resigned on 7 April, Korutürk appointed Naim Talu, a conservative spokesman for big business, as prime minister. Reform was now a dead letter and it was left to the post-election government to carry it out.

Turkey began to prepare for election. The right seemed firmly under Demirel's control, though it was still fragmented thanks to the formation of such small parties as the Reliance Party, the National Action Party and the National Salvation Party (NSP), formed after the closure of the Order Party in 1971. The left, heavily bruised after March 1971, began to coalesce around the new, social democratic RPP. Social democracy became so dominant after the October 1973 election that the generals were forced to intervene

even more forcefully in September 1980. The RPP had won with 33.3 per cent of the vote and 185 seats, but it still lacked the 226 necessary for a parliamentary majority. Ecevit was forced to form a coalition with a party of the right.

When Ecevit was asked to form the government, Turkey's establishment wanted to see an RPP–JP coalition, with Demirel restraining Ecevit's radicalism. But Demirel refused to join any coalition, knowing that the new government would face the odium of having to take unpopular economic measures in order to deal with a worsening economic crisis, partly the result of a downturn in the world economy. Ecevit was forced to turn to Necmettin Erbakan, the Islamist populist leader. After much haggling, the RPP–NSP coalition, formed in January 1974, was based not on any shared programme but on pure political opportunism. It was therefore fragile and not destined to last. It ended on 18 September when Ecevit resigned. Having become a charismatic leader following his decision to intervene in Cyprus after the Greek Cypriot coup against President Makarios, he was convinced that he would win an early election and come to power on his own.

He miscalculated badly because the parties of the right, fearing an Ecevit landslide, refused to permit an early election. Instead, they agreed to form a coalition under Demirel that came to be known as the 'Nationalist Front', the 'Rightist Front against the Left'. The cabinet, announced on 31 March 1975, was made up of four parties – Justice, Salvation, Reliance and the Nationalist Action Party – supported from the outside by Democratic Party defectors acting as independents. The Action Party was able to have two of its three deputies in the cabinet, thereby legitimising its neo-fascist ideology. The parties of the right used the coalition to colonise the state by placing their supporters in various ministries. The pro-Front media popularised the slogan 'Demirel in Parliament, Türkeş in the Street' and the party's militants, known as the Grey Wolves, began to play an even more active role in the violence so that political terrorism became a regular feature of Turkish life. Political violence plagued Turkey throughout the 1970s, provoking military intervention in 1980. Its immediate aim was to undermine Ecevit's social democratic movement as an electoral factor.

The attack on RPP meetings did not have the desired effect of intimidating the party's supporters. When the senate elections were held in October 1975, Ecevit's share of the vote increased from 35.4 to 43.9 per cent. Demirel's also increased, from 30.8 to 40.8 per cent, while that of the small parties declined. It seemed as though the country, tired of squabbling coalitions, was returning to a two-party system.

The voters responded neither to the Islamist propaganda of the Salvationists nor to the exploitation by the neo-fascists of the communist threat. They voted parties with programmes: the RPP's promise to create a capitalist Turkey 'with a human face', and Demirel's 'Great Turkey' of which all Turks would be proud.

Ironically the election results guaranteed the continuation of the Nationalist Front coalition until the general election for which all parties began to prepare in earnest via their control over the state structure. Violence increased throughout 1976 and 1977 with the government unable to check it. The liberal press spoke openly of the threat of fascism. Prime Minister Demirel decided that the only way to extricate himself from the Nationalist Front was to hold an early general election. On 5 April 1977 the JP and the RPP voted together to hold the election on 5 June.

The tempo and intensity of political violence increased sharply with the announcement of elections. It reached its climax on May Day 1977 when a huge rally was organised in Istanbul as a show of strength against what it described as 'the rising tide of fascism'. The right succeeded in turning the rally into a massacre. If their aim was to intimidate voters it failed miserably, for when the election was held the following month the turnout had increased from 68.8 per cent in 1973 to 72.2 per cent and though the RPP won 213 seats it failed to win the 226 necessary to form the government on its own.<sup>30</sup>

Ecevit formed a minority government, the first in Turkish history, but he failed to win a vote of confidence on 3 July. Demirel then formed the 'Second Nationalist Front' government on 21 July. In this coalition the JP had thirteen portfolios, the Islamists eight and the neo-fascists five, exposing how dependent the JP had become on the extreme right. However, this coalition did not survive the local elections of December 1977. On 31 December, Demirel failed to win the vote of confidence when twelve JP deputies who had resigned voted against the government because of the ongoing violence and oppression against the Kurds in the south-east.

Ecevit was able to form a cabinet with the support of defectors from the JP and the old RPP, all acting as independents. He knew that such men would never permit him to implement his programme, and all he promised to do was to 'restore peace and unity' in the country. But he failed to accomplish

<sup>30</sup> The RPP won 41.4 per cent of the ballot and the JP 36.9 per cent. The share of other parties, apart from the NAP, was substantially reduced and the Democratic and Reliance parties were virtually eliminated. The Salvationists lost half their seats in the assembly, suggesting that religion was not the primary factor in determining the way Turks voted. Only the NAP among the minor parties did well in 1977; its vote increased from 3.4 to 6.4 per cent and its representation in the assembly from three to thirteen seats. In this case both violence and state power had paid off.

even that and political terrorism took a sinister turn when the right began a campaign of assassination, culminating on 1 February 1979 with the murder of Abdi İpekçi, the editor of *Milliyet*, a liberal daily. Ecevit was forced to declare martial law in thirteen provinces on 25 December 1978 when the terrorists began targeting the Alevi community, an offshoot of the Shia sect. Even the limited martial law failed to curb the violence, and support for Ecevit began to erode. When partial senate and by-elections were held on 14 October 1979, the voters punished Ecevit: his vote declined to 29 per cent, that of the JP rose to 46.83 per cent, while the NSP and the NAP made no gains.

Ecevit resigned on 16 October and Demirel formed a minority government on 12 November. Another Nationalist Front cabinet was totally unacceptable though Demirel continued to depend on support of the right. The right had accomplished its aim of destroying social democracy just as the political left had been destroyed after 1971. Demirel won a vote of confidence on 25 November, although his government could not provide the political stability the region required after the political turmoil caused by the revolution in Iran and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Moreover, the onset of globalisation also required a government that was not amenable to populist electoral politics. Both required a military intervention that reorganised the entire political structure of Turkey to provide such a government. That is precisely what the military intervention of 12 September 1980 set out to do.

*Political and economic restructuring after 1980*

After dismissing the Demirel government, the generals set themselves up as the executive and legislative branch by establishing the National Security Council (NSC), made up of General Kenan Evren, who was chief of staff, and the chiefs of the army, navy, air force and gendarmerie. They governed, though some power was delegated to a technocratic cabinet led by retired admiral Bülent Ulusu until civilian rule was restored after the elections of November 1983. Meanwhile martial law was established and the generals set about restoring 'law and order'. All political life came to a standstill as the political parties were closed down and former politicians banned from participating in politics. Before some semblance of political life was restored, Turkey's institutions – the constitution, the electoral law, the universities – were radically amended so as to depoliticise the country.

When political parties were restored in 1983, only 'new politicians' were allowed to form them. Party leaders were carefully vetted, and were disqualified if they seemed a threat to the new regime. All members of the



1980 parliament were disqualified from political activity for five years and all party leaders for ten. Thus when elections were held only three parties participated. The centre-right had coalesced around Turgut Özal's Motherland Party, known by its Turkish acronym ANAP, and retired general Turgut Sunalp's Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP), while the centre-left was represented by the Populist Party led by Necdet Calp, a retired bureaucrat whose only qualification was that he had been İsmet İnönü's secretary!<sup>31</sup> Though banned, former politicians such as Süleyman Demirel, Bülent Ecevit, Necmettin Erbakan and Alpaslan Türkeş continued to cast a long shadow on political life.

The election of November 1983 brought Özal's ANAP to power with 45.15 per cent of the vote, with the Populist Party receiving 30.46 per cent and the NDP 23.27 per cent. Özal claimed that his party represented all the ideological tendencies – from left to right – that had existed before 1980. He was a technocrat who had led the economy in Demirel's last cabinet and continued to do so under the generals. He had asked for five years of 'social peace' with no political disruptions, and that is what the regime provided. He was given a free hand 'to correct the country's economic problems' as he saw fit. That meant bringing down inflation by freeing prices, cutting back on consumption by holding down wages, increasing exports, and signing agreements with foreign creditors to postpone debt repayments that amounted to about eighteen billion dollars.

In Turkey, parties tend to assume the character of the leader rather than remain parties of ideas or programmes. Thus the RPP became İnönü's party, the DP Menderes's party, the JP Demirel's party and the Islamist parties Erbakan's parties. ANAP was Özal's party right from the start, and his cabinets reflected his absolute control over the body; there was never a question of inner-party democracy. This remained true even after he became president in 1989 and formally left the party's leadership.

By early 1986 the banned leaders – Demirel, Ecevit, Erbakan and Türkeş – had emerged on the political scene behind proxy parties. But these men had to wait until the referendum of 6 September 1987 before their political rights were restored. The way was open for an early election set for 29 November, with Özal calculating that the less time the opposition had to organise the better for his party. ANAP won the election but with a

<sup>31</sup> See Üstün Ergüder, 'The Motherland Party, 1983–1989'; Andrew Mango, 'The Social Democratic Populist Party, 1983–1989', and Feride Acar, 'The True Path Party, 1983–1989', all in Heper and Landau (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*.

reduced majority of 36.29 per cent, with the Social Democrats (SHP), led by İsmet İnönü's son, Erdal İnönü, coming second with 24.81 per cent, and Demirel's True Path Party (TPP) coming in third with 19.15 per cent. Four smaller parties failed to clear the 10 per cent hurdle introduced by the new electoral law and therefore won no seats. The left vote was now divided between the SHP and Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DLP), which won 8.53 per cent.

ANAP'S position continued to decline, and the local election of 26 March 1989 proved to be disastrous; within five years the party's vote had declined from 45 to 22 per cent. Özal knew that he would lose his majority by the time the next general election was held in 1992, ending his political career. He therefore decided that he would have the assembly elect him president when General Evren's term ended in 1989. The party, divided between Islamists of the 'Holy Alliance' and nationalists, saw Özal's departure as an opportunity to seize control. Turgut Özal was elected Turkey's eighth president on 31 October and assumed office on 9 November 1989.

Özal's presidency (1989–93) was marked by political instability. Led by Yıldırım Akbulut, a colourless prime minister and without Özal's controlling hand, factions began to struggle for leadership, further weakening the party. There was talk of military intervention because the government was unable to deal with a growing Kurdish insurgency, political assassination, 'Islamic fundamentalism', and economic problems. The Gulf crisis of 2 August 1990 distracted the country's attention from domestic issues and strengthened Özal's position. But the effect was only temporary. A survey taken in March 1991 showed that support for ANAP had slipped in Istanbul from 22 to 18 per cent. The fortunes of the social democrats had also declined and only Demirel's TPP had made some gains. The election in June of the young, 'modern' Mesut Yılmaz – he was only forty-three – as ANAP's leader, and the defeat for the nationalist–religious groups, promised to improve the party's standing in the country. He decided to hold the general election in 1991 rather than 1992 when the economic situation would be even worse. Therefore the assembly voted to go to the polls on 20 October.

The elections vindicated Yılmaz's decision, and ANAP came second behind Demirel's TPP. The real losers were the divided social democrats. The Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), the most popular party in 1989, had slumped to third place with 20.8 per cent of the vote and eighty-eight seats while Ecevit's Democratic Left Party won 10.8 per cent of the vote and seven seats. Erbakan's Welfare Party entered the assembly with sixty-two seats, reflecting the growing political importance of Turkey's Muslim middle class.

There were no significant ideological differences between the two centre-right parties – ANAP and TPP – but they refused to merge and form a strong government. Vested interests prevailed and Yılmaz preferred to go into opposition rather than accept Demirel's leadership. Instead, despite ideological differences, Demirel formed a coalition with the Erdal İnönü's social democrats, the kind of non-ideological coalition the country had sought throughout the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> The government had 266 assembly seats and 48 per cent of the popular vote. In theory, it was a strong government capable of carrying out the reforms necessary to enter the global market.

Turgut Özal died suddenly on 17 April 1993, and was succeeded in May as president by Süleyman Demirel. He gave up the party's leadership to Tansu Çiller (1946-), a relatively young and inexperienced politician, with a doctorate in economics and close links with the business community. The American-educated Çiller was expected to give a modern image to the party. She continued the coalition with the social democrats whose position with the voters eroded as they gave support to right-wing policies detrimental to the common man. The Welfare Party – the reincarnation of the Islamist NSP – took advantage and strengthened its position with the electorate.

During the 1990s, the Kurdish insurrection, which began in 1984, became more serious and moderate Kurdish politicians formed political parties in order to put their case in the assembly. One such party, the People's Labour Party, was banned by the constitutional court in August 1993, and so was its successor, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), formed in May 1994. It too ran into problems. Meanwhile, the fortunes of the TPP declined rapidly under Çiller's leadership and the Welfare Party won the general election in December 1995 with 21.38 per cent of the vote and 158 seats.<sup>33</sup>

None of the parties had won sufficient seats to form the government, and attempts to form coalitions led nowhere. The secular parties refused to join a Welfare-led coalition while the leaders of TPP and ANAP – Çiller and Yılmaz – refused to serve under each other's leadership. In March 1996, Yılmaz and Çiller finally agreed to form a coalition, with a rotating premiership, which was

32 See M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey', *Comparative Politics* 30, 1 (October 1997) and Metin Heper and Filiz Başkan, 'The Politics of Coalition Government in Turkey, 1961–1999', *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 7, 1–2 (Spring 2001). See also Ziya Öniş, 'The Political Economy of the Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: The Rise of the Welfare Party in Perspective', *Third World Quarterly* 18, 4 (1997).

33 The DYP received 19.18 per cent and 135 seats; ANAP, 19.65 per cent and 133 seats; DSP, 14.64%; RPP, 10.71%, reverted to its historic name; MHP, 8.18%; HADEP 4.17%; YDM (New Democracy Movement), 0.48%; Nation Party, 0.45%; New Democracy Party (YDP), 0.34%; the TPP split as a result of Çiller's leadership and dissidents formed the Democrat Turkey Party.

supported by Ecevit's Democratic Left Party. Refah's Erbakan undermined this coalition, threatening to expose Çiller's alleged corruption by launching a parliamentary investigation. Such a coalition was too unstable to have a long life, and tensions within the cabinet forced Mesut Yılmaz to resign on 6 June. There was no choice but to ask Erbakan to form the next cabinet, the first to be led by an Islamist.

Erbakan's blackmail paid off, and Tansu Çiller agreed to form a coalition with the Islamists providing he froze the investigation against her. Erbakan, ever the opportunist, agreed and a 'Welfarepath coalition' with Erbakan as prime minister was announced on 29 June 1996.<sup>34</sup> In the wake of such unprincipled political behaviour, a survey revealed that people had lost confidence in politicians as well as other state institutions, and only confidence in the military had increased.

Despite his cautious approach as prime minister, Erbakan was constantly criticised in the secular media. The generals who dominated the NSC humiliated him by further expanding Turkey's military cooperation with Israel. Moreover, his efforts to appease the secular elites alienated his own grassroots supporters, who expected the kind of aggressive Islamist policy he had always spoken of before coming to power. But Welfare's leadership had become moderate and centrist because of the gains made by the Anatolian bourgeoisie, the so-called 'Anatolian tigers', since the 1980s. The Islamist bourgeoisie wanted to share in the benefits of globalisation, and these were forthcoming only if their party was in power. The rank and file, on the other hand, having suffered economic hardship, continued to voice radical demands.

In February 1997, things came to a head when a Welfare Party mayor organised a 'Jerusalem Day' demonstration and called for the liberation of the city from Israel. It was a demonstration reminiscent of the Menemen incident of 1930, and the secular forces, particularly the armed forces, were appalled that such an event could be staged so near the capital. The army responded by sending tanks through the Sincan township, arresting the mayor, declaring the Iranian ambassador, who had spoken at the demonstration, *persona non grata*, and launching an investigation against the Welfare Party. Moreover, on 28 February the generals, describing political Islam as more dangerous than Kurdish nationalism, forced Erbakan to accept a twenty-point programme designed to undermine the influence of political Islam. Its supporters were to be purged from the state apparatus along with schools for prayer leaders and

<sup>34</sup> See Heper and Başkan, 'The Politics of Coalition Government'.

preachers, the expansion of which the generals had legislated after September 1980 in order to counter the influence of 'leftist ideologies'.

In August a law was passed extending secular education from five to eight years with the aim of weakening the hold of political Islam on Turkey's lower- and lower-middle-class youth.

Premier Erbakan's position became untenable, and he resigned on 18 June 1997. He hoped that the coalition would survive if President Demirel appointed Tansu Çiller prime minister. But Demirel appointed ANAP's Mesut Yılmaz, and the courts launched an investigation against the Welfare Party. The leaders, realising that their party would be dissolved, responded by forming another party – the Virtue Party (VP, *Fazilet Partisi*) in December 1997 with Recai Kutan as its leader.<sup>35</sup> Each time the Islamist party was dissolved, its successor claimed to be more moderate and less Islamist. By May, Recai Kutan had abandoned the hardline Islamist rhetoric of Erbakan and no longer spoke of leaving NATO or of introducing Islamic banking. He also went to Anıtkabır to pay his respects to Atatürk, a demonstration that the Islamists were willing to join the mainstream of political life.

Nevertheless, the constitutional court dissolved the Virtue Party in June 2001, describing it as a hotbed of fundamentalism, especially for its role in promoting the headscarf in its campaign against the secular state. In July, Islamists formed Saadet or Felicity Party (FP), while in August the reformist and 'modern' wing of the Virtue Party formed the Justice and Development Party or JDP which they claimed was secular. Its leader was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the former mayor of Istanbul, who had been imprisoned for inciting religious hatred and the violation of secularism. He soon became the most popular leader, and polls showed that his party would win the next election.

The Yılmaz-led coalition with the Democratic Left Party and the Democrat Turkey Party, founded by anti-Çiller dissidents, lasted until November 1998. Yılmaz was brought down by an opposition censure motion that charged him with corruption and links with the 'mafia'. Ecevit, a rare politician with a clean record, formed a coalition with independents on 11 January 1999. His task was to lead Turkey to elections to be held on 25 April 1999. The capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the

<sup>35</sup> The constitutional court had disbanded the Welfare Party in January 1998 and banned Erbakan and the party's principal leaders from politics for five years. See Birol Yeşilada, 'Realignment and Party Adaption: The Case of *Refah* and *Fazilet* Parties', in Sabri Sayarı and Yılmaz Esmer (eds.), *Politics, Parties, and Election in Turkey* (Boulder and London: Lynne Reiner, 2003).

PKK, on 15 February heightened the nationalist mood of the country, virtually guaranteeing a nationalist landslide in the coming election.

Ecevit, who had virtually abandoned social democracy, had reinvented himself as an ardent nationalist while the Action Party had no problem flaunting its extreme nationalism. The election result was described as a political earthquake. The nationalists (DLP and NAP) had eclipsed the liberals (ANAP, TPP) because voters were tired of the corruption and bickering of Yılmaz and Çiller. The Islamist vote had also declined from 19 in 1995 to 15.94 per cent in 1999, but the party was still a force to be reckoned with, as municipal election results showed. HADEP, the pro-Kurdish party, had failed at the national level but it controlled cities in south-east Anatolia. The RPP, on the other hand, seemed to offer nothing to the voter and failed to enter parliament.<sup>36</sup>

Bülent Ecevit formed a coalition with ANAP and the NAP. His principal task was to manage a stagnant economy, and the coalition partners promised to work together and provide sorely needed political stability, thereby winning the support of the business community led by the Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association of Turkey (TÜSİAD, Türkiye Sanayiciler ve İş Adamları Derneği). But the devastating earthquakes of 17 August and 12 November 1999 marginalised plans to reform the economy, forcing the parties to pull together in the crisis. However, they could not agree to amend the constitution and allow Süleyman Demirel a second term when his presidency expired on 5 May 2000. They agreed to elect Ahmet Necdet Sezer as Turkey's tenth president. He was president of the constitutional court, an independent-minded liberal secularist who promised to supervise the reform agenda required to meet the 'Copenhagen criteria' for Turkey's entry into the EU. These criteria included economic reform, restoration of human rights and the protection of minorities (Kurds, Alevis and non-Muslims), as well as bringing the military under civil control. The EU's demands divided the coalition and slowed down the reform programme.

In 2001 a new crisis rocked the coalition, which had been the most stable government of the last five years. On 19 February President Sezer rebuked Ecevit for tolerating corruption in his cabinet. Ecevit exploded, describing Sezer's accusation as a 'crisis'. The stock market, anticipating a political crisis,

<sup>36</sup> The DSP share of the vote rose 10 per cent from 14 per cent in 1995 to 23.33 per cent; NAP's rose over 100 per cent from 8.18 to 17.07 per cent; the Virtue Party's vote fell from 19 to 15.94 per cent; ANAP fell 5 per cent to 14.12; DYP fell 8 per cent from 19 to 11.11 per cent; the CHP with 9.02 failed to clear the barrage. For the first time, the CHP found itself out of parliament; HADEP also failed to clear the 10 per cent threshold. See Ali Çarkoğlu, 'The Geography of the April 1999 Turkish Elections', *Turkish Studies* 1, 1 (Spring 2000).

collapsed, creating financial and economic turmoil. The country's financial situation was already weak, and Ecevit's words merely triggered a storm that was about to break.<sup>37</sup>

Economic instability inevitably led to political instability. There were rumours that the coalition would be replaced by an interim government that would lead the country to fresh elections. On 16 July, Ecevit issued the warning that rumours were undermining confidence in the coalition and its ability to carry out the IMF programme. President Bush's 'war on terror', following the 11 September attacks in New York and Washington, enhanced Turkey's strategic position, ensuring urgent US loans for the recovery programme. But Washington required that Turkey have a stable government as well.

The ideologically divided coalition failed to carry out many of the reforms required by the EU, such as the abolition of the death penalty, giving certain rights to the Kurdish population, or bringing the armed forces under civilian control. It was a question of votes and the NAP feared it would lose its constituency (the lower middle class of Anatolia) if it supported such reforms. Ecevit's sudden illness on 4 May 2002 raised the question of his resignation, but he refused to make way for a new leader. Had Ecevit resigned the coalition could have carried on under a new DLP leader such as İsmail Cem. As it was, however, the coalition was paralysed; the three parties knew that an early election might mean that they would not even clear the 10 per cent hurdle and be left out of the next parliament. Polls showed that the Justice and Development Party was considered the favourite in an early election.

On 7 July 2002, the NAP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli, finally called for an early election to be held on 3 November, bringing the political crisis to a head. Next day the deputy prime minister, Hüsamettin Özkan, and three others from the DLP resigned. When Foreign Minister İsmail Cem resigned from the cabinet and the party, there were rumours that he would form a new political party with Kemal Derviş and Hüsamettin Özkan that would govern Turkey with the support of centre-right parties (ANAP and the TPP). But Ecevit refused to resign, and announced on 16 August that he would lead the country to early elections.

İsmail Cem's New Turkey Party was formed on 22 July. Kemal Derviş, the most significant member of the troika, failed to join. When he resigned in August, he joined the RPP after failing to bring about a union of the centre-left

<sup>37</sup> See Sefa Kaplan, *Kemal Derviş: Bir 'kurtarıcı' öyküsü* (Istanbul: Metis, 2001). Kemal Derviş gives his own account, in Kemal Derviş, *Krizden çıkış ve çağdas sosyal demokrasi* (Istanbul: Doğan, 2006). He describes the period from 25 February 2001, when he received a phone call from Ecevit, to 23 August, when he joined the RPP.



that included elements of the centre-right. He wanted to create a political movement he called 'contemporary social democracy', capable of coming to power on its own at the next election and forming a strong government that could carry out the reforms necessary to end the political and economic crises that had plagued Turkey throughout the 1990s. When he failed to form such a movement, Derviş joined the RPP led by Deniz Baykal. His membership of the RPP and his support in the media improved the party's standing among voters. Surveys showed that Baykal was receiving only about 6 per cent of the vote while the JDP was in the 20 per cent range. Baykal had failed to enter parliament in 1999 and it was doubtful that he would do so in 2002. By early September the polls showed that the RPP had moved up from 6.9 to 14.3 per cent thanks to the 'Kemal Derviş factor'. Meanwhile, the JDP's vote had risen to almost 25 per cent. Confronted with this reality, on 18 September TÜSİAD's chair Tuncay Özilhan stated his preference for an RPP-JDP coalition, especially if Kemal Derviş was in charge of the economy. That was the hope of the bourgeoisie: that the election of 3 November 2002 would produce a two-party coalition so that the RPP could control the 'extremist, Islamist' tendencies of its JDP partners.

The election results on 4 November produced a surprise. Justice and Development emerged as the winner with over 34 per cent of the votes and 363 seats, more than the number required to form the government. The RPP had won 19 per cent of the votes and had 180 seats, becoming the only opposition. All the other parties had failed to clear the 10 per cent barrier and therefore had no representation in a parliament in which 37 per cent of the voters were not represented.<sup>38</sup> The voters were totally disenchanted with the old leaders and parties, and Erdoğan was seen as a new leader. Though he had cut his teeth in Erbakan's Welfare Party he had broken away and had not joined its successor. He also had the common touch: he lacked a modern, professional education and knew no foreign language, but had succeeded in becoming a dollar millionaire while mayor of Istanbul. He was seen as a role model.

Though the JDP had its roots in political Islam, most of its leaders had moved to the centre and declared their party to be secular, democratic and conservative, Muslim democrats, rather like the Christian democrats in Europe. Surveys showed that the party's support was 51 per cent rural and 49 per cent urban, and largely male. Housewives (17 per cent) tended to vote JDP while

<sup>38</sup> It seemed that the voters had humiliated and eliminated the former party leaders Bülent Ecevit, Devlet Bahçeli, Necmettin Erbakan, Mesut Yılmaz and Tansu Çiller. Even the newly founded Young Party of the business tycoon Cem Uzan won only 7.2 per cent of the vote. Professional advertisers had run his campaign and given the voters musical concerts and free food, as well as much publicity in the Uzan-owned media.

urban working women tended not to. The Felicity Party, formed on 21 July 2001, was the successor to former parties of political Islam, and the electorate humiliated it by giving it only 2.5 per cent of the vote. The JDP represented the counter-elite that had emerged in Anatolia, and the press described the 2002 election as 'the Anatolian revolution'.

The JDP relied on what may be described as the support of 'moderate' Muslims, the majority of whom (43 per cent) opposed the implementation of the *şeriat*. Some of its vote (27 per cent) came from the Felicity Party base, who voted for the JDP mainly because other parties had failed to deal with the economic crisis, marked by unemployment and rising prices. They reasoned that Erdoğan, having successfully run 'greater Istanbul', would be able to do the same with Turkey.<sup>39</sup>

Having served a prison sentence for making a divisive political speech, Erdoğan became prime minister in March 2003 only after a constitutional amendment permitted him to be elected to parliament. Under his leadership the party strengthened its position, increasing its vote in the local elections of March 2004 from 34 to 43 per cent while that of the RPP declined from 19 to 15 per cent. The Republican opposition offered no alternative programme while the governing party passed 'reform packets' to meet EU demands. Such was the progress in passing reforms that on 17 December 2004 the EU accepted Turkey's membership conditionally on further reforms being implemented, and announced that accession talks could begin on 3 October 2005.

The liberal press saw the talks as the beginning of a long journey that would create a 'new Europe and a new Turkey'. But there was also a nationalist backlash resulting from all the barriers that some European countries were raising in Turkey's path, constantly making new demands for Turkey to meet. Thus Baykal's RPP, like other opposition parties, was becoming nationalist and conservative rather than retaining its social democratic identity. The JDP was also affected by its own policies, which alienated its radical Islamist wing, disenchanted by the fact that the party had failed to legalise the headscarf in public spaces such as the universities, or open up more employment opportunities for the graduates of religious schools. On the other hand, secular forces in Turkey feared that Erdoğan had a secret agenda to Islamise society by colonising the state by means of packing the bureaucracy with his party's supporters, a fear heightened by Erdoğan's defence of a partial ban on alcohol sales in December 2005.

39 See Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002).

By 2006 the major political issue was the succession to President Ahmed Necdet Sezer, a militant secularist, whose term expired in May 2007. Secular Turkey was alarmed when it realised that Prime Minister Erdoğan was determined that his party should elect the president while it had the necessary majority in parliament to do so. The opposition therefore called for an early general election hoping that the JDP, whose popularity was thought to be declining, would not have the necessary votes in the new parliament to elect its nominee as president. It would therefore have to settle for a compromise candidate and elect an above-party president. But Erdoğan stated categorically: 'Don't expect early elections.' On 10 April 2007, President Sezer, presiding over his last NSC meeting, warned his audience that religious fundamentalism had reached alarming proportions and Turkey's only guarantee against this threat was its secular order, hinting that a military intervention was still on the cards if the governing party persisted in electing an 'Islamist' president. However, Erdoğan was faced with opposition from the radical 'Islamist' wing in his own party. Led by Bülent Arınç, the speaker of the house, they demanded that a committed 'Islamist' be nominated, failing which Arınç would put himself forward, thus dividing the party. Erdoğan compromised and chose Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, a founding member of the JDP and respected by the secularists as a moderate Islamist.

The Republican opposition in parliament objected that the president could not be elected without a two-thirds quorum in the chamber, and they took their objection to the constitutional court. The court agreed, and annulled the first round of voting on 1 May 2007. When, five days later, parliament again failed to elect Abdullah Gül, his candidacy was withdrawn and the scene was set for an early general election, to be held on Sunday 22 July. The parties began to negotiate mergers so as to present the electorate with a robust and united front against the JDP. The 'centre-left' RPP and the Democratic Left Party (DSP) failed to agree on the terms of a merger, though the DSP agreed to fight the election alongside the RPP. The centre-right parties – the True Path and the Motherland Party – tried to reinvent themselves by calling themselves the Democrat Party, hoping that the magic of the name would bring them the necessary 10 per cent of the vote to get into parliament. However ANAP withdrew from the negotiations and the party decided not to contest the election, thereby virtually disappearing from political life. Erdoğan tried to appeal to the centre-right voters by purging his party's electoral list of radical 'Islamists' so as to present a moderate face. The Nationalist Action Party decided to strengthen its ultra-nationalist image by including in its electoral list Tugrul Türkeş, the son of Alparslan Türkeş, the party's founder. Meanwhile

there were massive demonstrations in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir against the JDP and in support of a secular Turkey.

The result of the general election of 22 July 2007 confounded most predictions. The JDP performed far better than expected, winning 45.5 per cent of the vote and 341 parliamentary seats, while the RPP won 21 per cent and 112 seats, and the Nationalist Action Party won 15 per cent and 71 seats. Independents unofficially representing the DSP, which would not have cleared the 10 per cent barrier, won 23 of the 26 independent seats and were therefore able to articulate Kurdish grievances in the next parliament.

The 2007 election is considered one of the most important elections of the multi-party period. It highlighted the bankruptcy of the traditional centre-right parties – the DYP and ANAP – with the failure of the newly created Democrat Party to enter parliament. Some therefore see the JDP, despite its Islamist roots, as the new representative of the centre-right. The RPP's poor performance under its current leadership forced it to find a new leader who would take the party from ultra-nationalism back to the kind of social democracy that made it so successful in the 1970s. The ultra-nationalist NAP emerged as the party of the extreme right, having doubled its share of the vote since the November 2002 election. The 2007 election was undoubtedly one of the most important elections of the multi-party period, marking the bankruptcy of the centre-right. Following the elections, Erdoğan again chose Abdullah Gül as the AKP's candidate for the presidency, and he was duly elected the eleventh president of the Republic on 28 August 2007. At the time this chapter was written (October 2007) the AKP controlled three principal levers of power – the executive, the legislature and the presidency. It remained to be seen whether the party would use its powers to pursue policy to maintain the secular character of society or try to impose traditional–'religious' values on Turkey.