

**THE LEFT OF CENTER POLITICS IN TURKEY:
THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY 1965-1980**

by
AHMET METİN OKTAY

**The Department of Political Science and Public Administration
Bilkent University
ANKARA
August, 1998**

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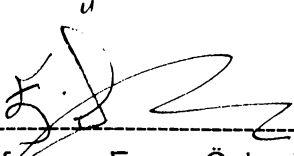
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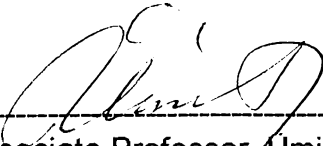
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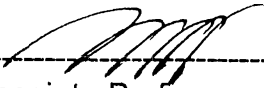
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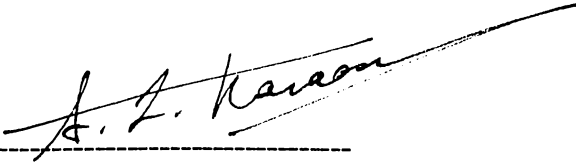
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Director

ABSTRACT

THE LEFT OF CENTER POLITICS IN TURKEY: THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY 1965-1980

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August 1998

This thesis analyzes the left of center politics implemented by the Republican People's Party (RPP) in Turkey from 1965 to 1980 in an empirical and historical context. The adoption of left of center stance, the attendant conceptual confusion, the unceasing intra-party competition for power, the social democratic discourse and certainly the elections and the electorate will be discussed along with domestic and foreign affairs as well as the socioeconomic transformation of the particular period.

Keywords: Left of Center, Social Democracy, Intra-Party Competition, Conceptual Confusion, Socioeconomic Changes.

ÖZET

TÜRKİYE'DE MERKEZ SOL: CUMHURİYET HALK PARTİSİ 1965-1980

Ahmet Metin Oktay

Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Ergun Özbudun

Ortak Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Jeremy Salt

Ağustos 1998

Bu çalışma, 1965-1980 yılları arasında Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) 'nin izlediği merkez sol çizgisini tarihsel bir çerçeve içerisinde, ceryan etmiş politik, sosyal ve ekonomik olayları değerlendirerek ele almıştır. Merkez sol çizginin kabulü ve bunu takip eden kavram kargaşası, parti içi süregelen çekişmeler, sosyal demokrat hareket ve kuşkusuz seçimler ve seçmenlerin analizi, iç ve dış meseleler ve dönemin sosyo-ekonomik gelişmeleri esas alınarak incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Merkez Sol, Sosyal Demokrasi, Parti-içi Çekişmeler, Kavramsal Kargaşa, Sosyo-Ekonomik Değişmeler

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And finally I am deeply grateful to all the authors for their significant works. In the end, their words count, not mine.

To My Father, Murat Oktay

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Turkish political system, neither completely absorbed by democratic challenges, nor released from its smothering embrace, welcomed the left of center movement under the auspices of the Republican People's Party (RPP) in the midst of the 1960s. With the transition to multi-party democracy, it would be nearly impossible to believe that our political life, characterized by the long struggle for democracy, would remain unaffected in the face of the various political movements of democracy. The left of center movement within the RPP progressed in gradual phases. The first phase was adopting the left of center slogan in the hope of bringing a new identity, which was hoped to appeal to the voters. The second phase was the acknowledgement of the left of center line to legitimize the slogan and to end the intra-party conflict of the movement. The last phase was the consolidation of the new stance with the change of the ossified party leadership, which was believed to represent and contain the opposition hampering the progress of the left of center line among both the Republicans and the electorate.

However, these phases hosted a series of tumultuous opposition stands, which had to be overcome. The left of center movement created an intellectual conflict, coupled with the widespread confusion, yet to be resolved today. The confusion, characterized by hesitation to associate the

Republicans with the left of center line, mainly stemmed from the disputable meaning of the movement on which little was done to elaborate.

Despite all the efforts to identify the RPP with a reformist and social democratic character strictly loyal to the principles of democracy on a unified and effective left of center line, the Republican appeal continued to dwindle. In the face of a seriously diminishing political appeal among the electorate, the Republicans underwent a series of reformist efforts to revive the founding spirit of the RPP and bring back the glory of the 1920s. Until the early 1970s, however, almost every effort proved futile bringing about tumultuous intra-party conflict and undesirable electoral defeats. Going into the 1970s, the RPP acquired the long-desired momentum and came out triumphant in the 1973 and 1977 General Elections polling 33.3 percent and 41.1 percent of the vote respectively.

The Second Chapter studies the period of the birth of the left of center in 1965 to its consolidation in 1972. It purports to enlighten the discernable pattern, which made the left of center politics weak and fragmented until 1972, and brings to light the significant events which left their mark on the character of today's left of center politics.

The rise of the left of center on a social democratic discourse started with the 1973 General Elections. In order better to examine the particular political phenomenon, which marked the beginning of the high tide of left of center politics, one must, above all, understand the social, economic, and political factors that brought about this historical episode. The aim of the Third Chapter, therefore, is to throw light on the process in which the left of

center reached its culmination. The chapter elucidates the question of what actually contributed to the rise of the Republican votes through analyzing the 1973 General Elections, as well as the party program and policies. To that end, it examines the sociopolitical reasons that led the Republicans to adopt a social democratic nature in a perplexing revisionist manner, as well as the socioeconomic factors that promoted the upsurge of the social democratic ideology in Turkey. Furthermore, the post-election days, which comprised the long-drawn-out negotiations for a government, and domestic and foreign issues that shaped the political atmosphere of the decade, are examined to provide a broader picture to better understand how the RPP increased its electoral appeal.

The Fourth Chapter focuses on evaluating the development of the left of center politics from the glamorous days of the 1977 until the unavoidable fall towards the end of the decade. It aims to underline the factors that caused the Republicans to abandon their social welfare policies and recent electoral base as suddenly and dramatically as their remarkable rise to the top. Finally, the focus is shifted to clarify the reasons as to why the left of center depleted its electoral power. The continuous intra-party competition for power, the repeated amendments of the party statute and the mid-term elections of 1979, as well as the domestic economic situation of the period, are also examined in order to come up with sound arguments to explain the unprecedented fall of the votes of the left of center.

It bears repeating that one cannot understand Turkish politics without a grasp of the Turkish left of center tradition, which took shape in the

1970s, and, consequently, the narrative now turns to a closer examination of the nature of this ideology and its historical account in Turkey.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF LEFT OF CENTER

2.1. The Republican People's Party Adopts the Left of Center Slogan

The political expression of 'left of center' first appeared in Turkish politics shortly before the 1965 general elections as the slogan of the Republican People's Party (RPP). İsmet İnönü, the party leader, explained the new party position for the first time in a speech on 28 July 1965, which was published the next day in the *Milliyet* daily.¹ However, its roots date back to a few day-long talks between İnönü and İsmail Rüştü Aksal, the Secretary-General of the RPP, on Heybeli Island, before the 1961 elections.²

It is a well-known fact that the majority of people perceived the RPP, whether in government or opposition, as a state party far from being progressive. The past of the party did not prove to be an advantage either. In addition to its *pro-status quo* image over the years, the RPP seemed to remain in a position that supported the 1960 military intervention in the hope of increasing its overall popularity. The left of

¹ Feroz Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye* [The Turkish Experiment in Democracy] 1945-1980, trans. Ahmet Fethi (İstanbul: Hil Yayın, 1996), 247.

² Metin Toker, *İnönü'nün Son Başbakanlığı* [İnönü's Last Primeministership] 1961-1965 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), 234.

center slogan, this new political expression, was adopted in the hope that it would bring a new identity to the party, thus appealing to the voters. At that time, however, adopting the 'left of center' slogan did not actually focus on moving left of center and changing the ideology and the program accordingly; rather, it was more like defining the old views with new phrases.³ It was shortly before the general elections of 10 October 1965 that İnönü and his staff defined the party stance as left of center. There was not enough time for the members of the party to fully understand the meaning of this new position, let alone internalize it and then clearly present it to public opinion for approval. Coupled with its lack of acceptance and understanding among party members, there was a very sensitive connotation to overcome in the expression of left of center. Ever since the beginning of the secularist movement led by the Republicans in the early days of the republic, the opponents of secularism had tried to portray the movement as being hostile to Islam and as being a preliminary to establishing communism in Turkey. The RPP, standing for Kemalist principles, was long attacked for being pro-Communist by the partisans of Islam who believed Kemalism to be irreligious.⁴ It was, therefore, very important to assure the public that being left of center did not mean being communist. However, the members of the RPP, unable to fully appreciate the new party ideology,

³ Ayşe G. Ayata, *CHP: Örgüt ve İdeoloji* [RPP: Organization and Ideology] (Ankara: Gündoğan Yayınları, 1992), 82.

⁴ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1993), 264.

were not prepared to deal with the possibility of the Justice Party (JP) placing the left of center line in the same category as communism in their election campaign.

2.2. The Left of Center Slogan in the 1965 General Elections

It was not long after the introduction of the new political slogan that the Republicans realized the disputable connotations of the left of center slogan. The left of center slogan was immediately portrayed as the center of the left by the rival parties, which insinuated a communist nature. Therefore, even though the position of the party was defined as left of center and endorsed by party chairman İnönü, it was almost never strongly pronounced in the election campaign of 1965.⁵ Only once did Bülent Ecevit, who served in İnönü's administration as Minister of Labor in 1961, utter the left of center line on behalf of the RPP on the radio in an attempt to mobilize those voters who regarded the party as one of out-dated political pronouncements.⁶

Nevertheless, the new slogan did not profit the RPP in the 1965 elections. Ahmad⁷ argues that, in the hope of weakening the growing appeal of the Turkish Labor Party (TLP), the Republicans had devised the left of center slogan; however, they underestimated the potential of its controversial meaning, which was cleverly manipulated with religious

⁵ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 248.

⁶ Metin Toker, *İsmet Paşa'nın Son Yılları* [The Last Years of İsmet Pasha] 1965-1973 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1993), 85.

⁷ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 248.

sentiments by mainly the Justice Party (JP). The JP won a landslide victory, gaining an absolute majority of both the popular votes cast and the parliamentary seats (*See Appendix A*). The Republican vote plummeted to 28.7 percent, the lowest since the 1950s, leading to long-lasting internal disputes.

2.3. Why did the Left of Center Slogan Fail in 1965?

The timing of the adoption of such a new and controversial slogan created internal disquiet following the election defeat. The on-going debates within the RPP following the defeat aimed to identify the main reasons behind the election disappointment. Despite the fact that the RPP had adopted a new stance, as Zürcher states "it lacked credibility as a progressive-party, certainly with İnönü at the helm."⁸ Furthermore, along with the members of the party, the voters on the whole, could not fully understand this new movement of left of center. Nor did they really like the name, mainly due to the successful campaign of the JP, which kept up a constant harassment of the leftist movements. The new campaign slogan, as Kedourie argues, "enabled the Justice Party to tar the Republicans with the Communist brush."⁹ Süleyman Demirel, the JP chairman, exploited the theme of Islam, emphasizing the Islamic character of the party not only to assure supporters of the Democrats in provincial towns and countryside against accusations of freemasonry,

⁸ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 265.

⁹ Elie Kedourie, *Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 128.

but also to hinder the Republican campaign. During his election campaign, Demirel repeatedly declared: "Communism will not enter Turkey because our population is 98 percent Muslim" and that "Left of center is the road to Moscow and we are right of center and on the path to God."¹⁰ And in fact, it would be far-fetched for the Republicans to remain unaffected and to carry out a positive campaign with such a controversial slogan, the meaning of which was still a mystery in 1965. Therefore, it would not be mistaken to say that people could not identify the left of center slogan as the embodiment of their own hopes in 1965.

2.4. Disputing Proposals for the Future

With İnönü as party chairman, history repeated itself once more, bringing the RPP into the arms of election defeats, as in the 1950, 1954, and 1957 general elections. To some, it was İnönü and his failure to communicate in a way that would appeal to the general electorate that led to the election disappointment. To others, it was the new slogan, left of center. To the rest, it was a combination of both. It was interesting that the *Akis* magazine, known to favor İsmet İnönü, once published a headline soon after the 1965 elections depicting ever-growing concern at İnönü's leadership of the RPP. It read that "İnönü has completed his last duty for the nation..."¹¹ On October 15, the *Milliyet* newspaper made this headline

¹⁰ Kedourie, *Politics*. 128.

¹¹ Toker, *İsmet*. 58.

an eye-catching first-page article, the impact of which had a devastating effect in the political arena.¹²

Those sympathizers and members of the RPP resenting the goings-on of the party asserted three options. The first option was that İnönü would leave politics. Second, the left of center stance would be disowned. The third option was the combination of the first two.

As a matter of fact, İnönü himself started thinking about leaving the Turkish political arena. He made a series of consultative contacts with some top-level party members¹³, two of whom were Kemal Satır and Turhan Feyzioğlu. What follows is convincing evidence in his own words quoted from his personal diary, "*Ece Muhtıras*"(The Communique of the Queen):

20 October 1965: I told Kemal Satır that I was going to withdraw. He will talk with İsmail Rüştü Bey.
24 October 1965: I sent for Turhan at 18:00. Talked until 20:00. The issue of withdrawal. He understands the essence. Finds it detrimental to withdraw right away...¹⁴

By the end of October 1965, it was certain that İnönü would retain his position as the party chairman. Thus, there was only one option left, seeming still somewhat practicable and absolutely necessary to the

¹² Toker, *İsmet*. 58.

¹³ On various occasions, İnönü met with Kemal Satır, İsmail R. Aksal, Turhan Feyzioğlu, Nihat Erim, Ferit Melen, Hıfzı Oğuz Bekata, Kemal Demir, Turan Şahin, İbrahim Öktem, Nüvit Yetkin, Cihat Baban, Turan Güneş, İlyas Seçkin, Hüdai Oral, Muammer Erten, Tahsin Bekir Balta.

¹⁴ Toker, *İsmet*. 61.

rising opposition of the left of center line within the party. The left of center stance had to be abandoned.

The majority of the Party Assembly asserted that left of center politics had not been clearly identified but emphasized the importance of the RPP's sticking firmly with the left of center stance. On the other hand, a substantial centrist group opposed the left of center tactics and blamed the election defeat solely on the new ideology. This group maintained that moving left of center had been a wrong strategy to rely on. To the criticisms of the left of center stance, İnönü's answer was crystal clear and quite determined: "It is not like we have just moved left of center...We, for the last forty years, have been following left of center policies."¹⁵ It was evident that the RPP would carry on exactly as it had started off before the 1965 general elections and that its political ideology would remain left of center. After all, İnönü knew that getting rid of the left of center slogan would further undermine the trustworthiness of the RPP, whose recent past in this aspect had been rather shaky.¹⁶

2.5. By-elections of the Senate in 1966

One-third of the Senate was to be re-elected in 1966. That meant 50 new senators. Once again the Republicans had high hopes which can be attributed to the media resentment of the JP government six months after it assumed power. The article by Abdi İpekçi in *Milliyet* at the beginning of April 1966 was clearly portraying the overall frustration and

¹⁵ Toker, *İnönü*. 236.

¹⁶ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 250.

disappointment in the eyes of key media figures.¹⁷ Moreover, the general opinion was that the JP government would retrogress in the by-elections of the Senate. The election estimates in major newspapers were also supporting the general opinion. However, despite the media and the general opinion of the Republicans, the JP won 31 seats in the Senate as opposed to 13 seats by the RPP on September 16, 1966. What seems ironic is that despite the seeming approval of the left of center line within the party, mainly through İnönü's influence, İnönü did not mention the left of center expression very much, primarily focusing on the high cost of living and the threat of growing radical Islamist movements during his campaign. The Senate elections campaign clearly showed that even İnönü was not comfortable with using the left of center tactics. Consequently, the overall confusion of the Republicans and the voters was revealed in the election results. The defeat led, inevitably, to acrimonious debates on the left of center movement within the party. The conservative side of the RPP based their assertions on the accusations of a socialist and even pro-Communist stance disguised in the name of left of center line. They believed that moving left of center would soon take the RPP into the grave. İnönü, recognizing the disputable meaning of left of center, and wishing to bring a healthy end to the growing controversies, stated: "We are on the left of center, but not Socialist. No

¹⁷ Toker, *İnönü*. 236.

one opposes the left of center. We shall expound on the left of center line to the Turkish nation all together.”¹⁸

However, this was not the last of internal dissension over the left of center movement. At the beginning of August 1966, it was again the first issue on the agenda, the left of center movement. This time the opposition was not completely against the left of center ideology. However, they insisted that being a new movement, left of center needed a new name. This new name would assume full responsibility to defend, explain and spread the left of center line. The views of the opposition were outlined in a communiqué called “*Arif Ertunga Muhtırası*”¹⁹ (The communiqué of Arif Ertunga).

2.6. The 18th Party Congress: The Victory of the New Reformers

The 18th Party Congress staged a fierce competition not only for the party leadership, but also for the General Secretariat. İnönü reasserted his position defeating Kasım Gülek by 929 to 230 votes.²⁰ The polarization within the party became very clear during the election of the Secretary-General. There were two competing groups of opposing averments on the left of center stance. On one side was the group called the New Reformers led by Bülent Ecevit. They were resolute on the left of center line and insisted that the party ideology had to be defined as left of center at all costs. On the other side was the centrist-

¹⁸ Toker, *İsmet*. 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁰ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 251.

group called the 75s (*75'ler*) led by Turhan Feyzioğlu. They, on the contrary, maintained that the left of center ideology had to be abandoned and asserted that the centripetal readjustment of the party ideology was an absolute necessity. Unlike what the 75s claimed, the New Reformers tied the poor showing of the RPP in the previous elections to the internal disputes and hesitations about the left of center stance.²¹ Bülent Ecevit and his men believed that adopting the left of center stance was just the departure the Republicans needed to appeal to the proletariat. As Kedourie mentions, Ecevit believed that “the party had for too long been identified with the Kemalist doctrine and with the bureaucratic style of government for so long obtained in Turkey.”²² He considered the left of center as an ideology, which would allow the party to change its character in accordance with the socioeconomic changes of the period.²³

The 18th party congress resulted in the election of Bülent Ecevit as the Secretary-General of the party, marking the approval of the left of center ideology by the majority of the Republicans.

²¹ Toker, *İsmet*. 80.

²² Kedourie, *Politics*. 128.

²³ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 251.

However, the victory of Ecevit's group did not end the internal rivalry and conflicts; rather, it led the way to more severe disputes which reached their peak at the 4th Extraordinary Congress on 28 April 1967.

Feyzioğlu and his supporters had taken control of the Senate and Parliament groups as well as setting up a group of eight people, known as the 8s²⁴ (*8'ler*) mainly to provide a continuous opposition to the Secretary-General. However, the 8s did not remain contented with their opposition role and aimed at seizing control of the party. Feyzioğlu declared that "the struggle within the RPP was between those who completely and whole-heartedly accept the congress decision [his faction] and those who desire to drive the party toward socialism [Ecevit's group] or those who tolerate [İnönü]."²⁵ Following the extraordinary congress, a seemingly centrist group of 48, 33 representatives and 15 senators who objected to the left of center line, resigned from the RPP. To them, the RPP was on the wrong track, led by a pro-socialist leadership whose actions had not been properly contained.²⁶ They later founded the Reliance Party to continue their political struggle, this time from outside.

The left of center movement created long-lasting infighting which, in turn, resulted in several splits and resignations. However, as

²⁴ Turhan Feyzioğlu, Emin Paksüt, Orhan Öztrak, Ferit Melen, Turan Şahin, Coşkun Kırca, Süreyya Koç and Fehmi Alparslan were known to be the 8s.

²⁵ Toker, *İsmet*. 96.

²⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 266.

Özbudun argues, this “gave the RPP an ideologically more cohesive and homogenous leadership”²⁷ going into the 1970s.

2.7. Hopes Linger for the Left of Center

The by-elections of the Senate and the Parliament along with the local elections took place on 2 June 1968. The JP won all of the five parliamentary seats that were empty, along with 38 seats in the Senate. Meanwhile, the RPP won 13 seats in the Senate. Since the local elections were conducted at the same time with the by-elections of the Senate and the Parliament, each party using different methods regarded itself as the winner. As Toker²⁸ suggests, the JP had progressed in six cities and regressed in 14, while the RPP lost power in 10 cities but was profitable in eight. The overall result was that the JP had increased its seats both in the Senate from 97 to 101 and in the Parliament from 256 to 261, whereas the RPP had increased its number of senators from 30 to 34 while maintaining its 95 seats in the Parliament. As for Bülent Ecevit, it was the victory of the left of center. Zürcher argues that “the improved share of the votes of the RPP in the big cities seemed to indicate that the new line was beginning to have an effect.”²⁹ Moreover, the increased share of the Republican votes in urban areas, as Ahmad³⁰

²⁷ Ergun Özbudun, “Turkey” in *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*, ed. Myron Weiner and Ergun Özbudun (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 347.

²⁸ Toker, *İsmet*, 116.

²⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey*, 266.

³⁰ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*, 256.

argues, was very significant in that winning the majority of the rich Trakya (*Thrace*), Marmara, and Aegean regions, which were heavily urbanized, had been traditionally the key to winning the general elections. Whatever the case may be, although it was not a clear victory, it was definitely far from a disaster for the left of center.

2.8. Hopes Become Forlorn: The 1969 General Elections

The parliament changed the electoral law in 1969 (Law No.1036) to annul the national remainder system and to resume the original *d'Hondt* system. The RPP started its election campaign with the election manifesto: "We want authority from the people to establish a humane order, the RPP's program of change of order."³¹ It was proposing a series of radical social reforms to include a land reform policy. Ecevit carried out most of the election campaign, making radical promises under the slogan, "land to those who cultivate it, water to those who use it."³² Some landowners might have perceived this slogan as a threat to private property. In the meantime, İnönü and the conservative wing in the party were making moderate comments and less radical promises.³³ In a way, the campaign strategy of the party lacked harmony during the election campaign.

The 1969 General elections were the biggest disappointment, worse than that of 1965. The RPP acquired only 24.7 percent of the

³¹ Ayata, *CHP*. 84.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 256.

popular votes cast (*See Appendix A*). However, due to the fact that the *d'Hondt* system favors the larger parties, the RPP improved its share of seats in the Parliament from 134 to 143.

The lack of harmony in the campaign strategy and the still ambiguous position of the Republicans on the left of center line contributed greatly to the election disaster in 1969. It was confusing for the voters; while "Ecevit and his supporters enthusiastically embraced the new orientation of the party, İnönü seemed to have second thoughts."³⁴ Besides deliberately making moderate speeches focused on the RPP's Kemalist traditions, just before the elections, İnönü supported a motion in the parliament to grant the old members of the Democrat Party (DP) their political rights. He even arranged meetings of conciliation with Celal Bayar, the ex-DP leader, in the hope of attracting the old DP voters.³⁵ However, such efforts could easily be considered as incongruous with the latest radical left of center campaign. The fall in the RPP vote, therefore, was most likely a result of the confusion and frustration of the voters that led to them punishing the RPP for its internal disagreements over the left of center stance.

2.9. The 1971 Military Ultimatum: Ecevit in Conflict with İnönü

In the early 1970s, Turkey was on the brink of serious disorder. Demirel's government hoped to revitalize the economy through deficit

³⁴ Zürcher, *Turkey*, 266.

³⁵ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 256.

finance and foreign loans which, in turn, instigated inflation.³⁶ As a result, social discontents and stress got increasingly out of hand, with inevitable repercussions in the form of public disorder, starting initially in the universities. Not long after did the student revolts spread from the university campuses into the streets. Street demonstrations paved the way to fratricidal strife among the groups of students aligned with either extreme left or right wings. As Kedourie argues "political disorder ceased to be simply a matter of street demonstrations."³⁷ Furthermore, Demirel's government was manifestly powerless in stopping the agitation on the campuses and in the streets. In addition to its incompetence in curbing the increasing range and scope of violence, the JP government had also failed to get any legislation to carry out the social reforms provided for by the 1961 Constitution, the consequence of which was the attendant disquiet especially within the military.³⁸

Economic crises bred social violence. The combined effects of economic and social unrest led the high command of the Turkish armed forces handing Demirel an ultimatum on 12 March 1971. Although not a direct coup as in 1960, this was another intervention by the military

³⁶ Kedourie, *Politics*. 129.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁸ Clement H. Dodd, *The Crisis of Turkish Democracy* (Huntingdon: The Eothen Press, 1983), 15.

aiming to end anarchy and to carry out social and economic reforms through forming "an above-party or technocratic government."³⁹

Demirel's immediate reaction to the ultimatum was resignation. Following his departure from the government, an enforced government was formed with Nihat Erim, a member of the conservative wing of the RPP, as Prime Minister. Despite İnönü's earlier denouncement of the military's interference in politics, he later gave support to the technocracy formed by Erim, once his close associate.⁴⁰ In Ahmad's⁴¹ opinion, İnönü was aware that Erim could have possibly used his political influence to amass support for the conservative wing against the radicals led by Ecevit within the RPP. On the other hand, the RPP Secretary-General, Bülent Ecevit, announced that he would by no means support a government formed and backed by the military. He did not approve of the party's affiliation with the military and its enforced government. Ecevit's declaration clearly revealed his disagreement with İnönü. For the first time, he was challenging İnönü for what he believed in favor of the left of center ideology. Until 1971, İnönü had always supported Ecevit and his group and it was through İnönü's patronage that Ecevit became a rising star. Who would have conceived that someday their

³⁹ Ergun Özbudun, 'Turkey: Crises, Interruptions, and Reequilibrations' in *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, Seymour Martin Lipset, n.p., 234.

⁴⁰ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 271.

⁴¹ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 304.

roads would part? Certainly, many people, as Ayata⁴² argues, held the opinion that İnönü represented the *status quo* and was the biggest obstacle against making radical changes in the RPP's ideology. Moving left of center could not fully succeed in changing the popular image of the Republicans. Now it was time to go into changing the shop-window of the party. This meant changing the party leader, perhaps something over due. However, İnönü also symbolized the arduous struggle for democracy. The truth of the matter was that it would not be easy to contravene İnönü, especially while his advocates still dominated the party. Consequently, Ecevit resigned as Secretary-General. In a way, he could justify his resignation as the only way to save the left of center line in the eyes of the electorate, who were baffled to have seen the RPP realigning with the military and bureaucracy.⁴³ The left of center ideology was now in the throes of serious confrontation. It was a choice between a vague and relatively moderate left of center stance in the patronage of the octogenarian İnönü and a more radical and fearlessly defined left of center line under the leadership of the energetic Ecevit.

2.10. The RPP Comes to A Crossroads: The 5th Extraordinary Congress

In the ensuing days of his resignation, Ecevit turned towards the local branches of the party in search for support and managed to amass a

⁴² Ayata, *CHP*. 85.

⁴³ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 258.

substantial amount, which enabled him to oppose the ossified realm of İnönü. In the meantime, seeing the large support for Ecevit in such big cities as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Adana, İnönü called for an extraordinary party congress in the hope of preventing Ecevit's further lead in local party congresses. He also made it very clear that he would withdraw from politics if the congress happened to elect a party administration incongruous with his political views.⁴⁴

The 5th extraordinary party congress was planned to be held on May 5. However, due to a sudden health problem experienced by İnönü, it was postponed until the next day. May 6 witnessed a challenge between the past and the future. İnönü and Ecevit settled old scores with one another perhaps for the last time. İnönü stated that Ecevit was guiding the party in an unknown direction, making it an instrument for his dark ambitions.⁴⁵ He played his last trump card by threatening once again that he would resign if the party administration, heavily dominated by Ecevit's advocates, received the support of the majority.⁴⁶

Despite all the conservative warnings, accusations of dark ambitions and more importantly, İnönü and what he had stood for, the party administration received a vote of confidence, marking the end of the realm of İnönü. İnönü resigned from the party he helped to found

⁴⁴ Ayata, *CHP*. 85.

⁴⁵ İsmail Cem, *Tarih Açısından 12 MART* [The Historical Account of 12 March] (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1978), 184.

⁴⁶ Ayata, *CHP*. 85.

almost 50 years ago on May 7, 1972. His resignation cannot just be regarded as the overthrow of a political giant; rather, it was the end of an era seasoned with old traditions, one-man rule, and pro-status quo image.

In accordance with the 28th article of the party charter, another congress was convened on May 14 and elected Bülent Ecevit as the third party chairman of the RPP.⁴⁷

The tumultuous 5th extraordinary party congress had been the platform for a confrontation between the past in the figure of İnönü and the future in the figure of Ecevit. As Cem suggests “yesterday cannot defeat today as the past cannot defeat the future,”⁴⁸ and the future buried the past in history.

It suffices to say that the Republicans chose the more radical and fearlessly defined left of center line, ignored the old traditions and rejected the pro-status quo image of the party in the patronage of the octogenarian İnönü. Their choice marked the beginning of a new era, in which there was no longer any hesitation in associating the RPP with the left of center line. With Ecevit at the helm, the left of center meant the RPP and the RPP meant the left of center.

⁴⁷ Toker, *İsmet*. 302.

⁴⁸ Cem, *12 Mart*. 186.

CHAPTER III

ECEVİT'S ERA

2.1. New Ideology in the Air: Social Democracy

Soon after Ecevit ousted İnönü from the chairmanship of the party and increased his political leeway, he put the issue of a new party ideology on the agenda. The RPP was now undoubtedly on the left of the center of the political spectrum. However, the political discourse had to be clearly redefined in conformity with the left of center movement and with the needs of the 1970s. The RPP rephrased the party ideology as 'democratic left' and joined the Socialist International, which opened for the Republicans the door to Social Democracy. With this epochal membership, the RPP was aiming to be a Social Democrat party with democratic left ideology on the left of the center of the political spectrum.⁴⁹

Traditionally the social democrat parties had been distinguished by their emphasis on the middle and lower economic and social classes, in addition to their historical affiliation with the working class.⁵⁰ With this in mind, the social democrat Republicans were to change their party base from the military and civilian bureaucracy, rich land owners in the

⁴⁹ Ayata, *CHP*. 87.

⁵⁰ David Caute, *The Left in Europe: Since 1789* (London: BAS Printers Ltd., 1966), 229.

countryside and influential business circles to the urban poor, the working class and the small Anatolian bourgeoisie. In doing that, however, the Republicans had no intention to identify the RPP with socialism; rather, they wished to establish a social democratic nature within the party. In Ecevit's opinion, social democracy was a flexible ideology in adapting to modern needs caused by recent socioeconomic changes.⁵¹ After all, social democratic discourse could be used as a revisionist tool of social change to establish a social welfare state. "Social democracy's great asset was its offer to bring about far-reaching improvements and to satisfy a rising gradient of expectations without occasioning significant disruptions in the lives of the ordinary people."⁵²

In a way, Turkey was not completely unfamiliar with social democracy. The 1960s had been the era of the social democrats in Western Europe. The upsurge of the popularity of social democracy had also reached Turkey in the late 1960s. The intellectuals had already welcomed the socialist pronouncements and supported the goals of social democracy through writing articles that promoted labor rights and political participation as well as a welfare state.⁵³ The conditions that brought about the rise of social democracy in Western Europe in the

⁵¹ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 309.

⁵² Willie Thompson, *The Left in History* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 191.

⁵³ Hurşit Güneş, *Turan Güneş: Türk Demokrasisinin Analizi* [An Analysis of Turkish Democracy by Turan Güneş] (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık Ltd., 1996), 14.

1960s were now present in Turkey. The rapidity of industrial and economic growth of the Western European nations in the 1960s had resulted in social dislocation, which, consequently, aggravated the social discontent of the people with their present governments. As Thompson⁵⁴ points out, the rise of class-consciousness, which was fostered by the gap between the living standards of the upper class and those of the middle and lower classes, had stimulated the support for the welfare programs of the social democratic parties in Western Europe. In this respect, rapid industrialization and high economic growth of the 1960s had increased the cost of living in Turkey deteriorating the living standards of the people throughout the country. In the early 1970s, it was obvious that Turkish people, on the whole, were not happy with their government.

Furthermore, the growing economies of Western European countries had created a high demand for labor; the lack of which generated a labor shortage. Consequently, it had produced "migration and demographic shifts, giving a multi-ethnic and multicultural character to European states."⁵⁵ The utmost outcome of labor shortage was that it stimulated not only a cultural awareness, but also an in-society antagonism. Those who suffered from cultural or ethnic segregation allied themselves with social democratic pronouncements. There was a

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Left*. 191.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

similar case in Turkey in the early 1970s. Drastic economic growth and industrialization produced migration and demographic shifts. The flow of rural workers to urban areas created an underprivileged class facing the high cost of living and relentless competition for jobs in big cities. The demographic shift created a new awareness among the multi-ethnic urban poor who could be enticed by the promises of social democracy such as social and economic reforms for justice and a welfare state. Under these circumstances, the Republicans hoped that the majority of the electorate would vote for the social democratic RPP, which now had to prove itself to be the champion of the people. The Republicans did not adopt social democratic discourse because they regarded it as a chance to keep up with the latest trends of sociopolitical thought in the Western world. Instead, the adoption of social democratic discourse was aimed at immediate practical ends and was chartered by rapid socioeconomic changes; rather than, by a well-defined long-term political strategy. In the face of electoral volatility and discontent, it was, arguably, a necessity for political survival. The majority of people hit by the high cost of living were not content with their lives. Therefore, for electoral purposes, the RPP had to approach to the majority of the people in a way that would appeal to them. As Karpat clearly points out:

The survival of a political party in Turkey depends, in view of population still consisting of large groups of people with low living standards, on its ability to formulate its program in accordance with the basic needs of the largest social group.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 457.

However, there was something that the Republicans had overlooked. When a political tradition is created, it is essential to make clear what is actually being followed; not only a mode of thought or set of practices, but also a contemporary reality in search of legitimacy.⁵⁷ With this in mind, the Republicans should have thoroughly examined the origin and principles of social democracy in order to fully understand and correctly explain the role that the RPP, under the leadership of Ecevit, was determined to assume. Without clear conceptual understanding of the ideology, the new political discourse could, in the long run, create further alienation of the voters dismayed that social democracy did not turn out to be what they thought. As it is well known by now, the conceptual confusion had hampered the overall performance of the Republicans, both breaching intra-party harmony and appalling the voters. As Sassoon points out, "in politics it is very often the case that an apparently nominalistic dispute, over a certain slogan, a symbol, a word, a controversy leaves outsiders baffled as to its meaning."⁵⁸ Therefore, the RPP of the 1970s was not conceptually prepared to create a new political tradition and was doomed to get lost in search of legitimacy in the eyes of the voters who could define social democracy based on their own needs.

⁵⁷ Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1996), 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

3.2. The 1973 General Elections

The unofficial election campaigns had started in as early as the fall of 1972 with Demirel's JP as the favorite winner of the upcoming elections. Yet, due to the martial law, which was lifted only three weeks before the elections, official election campaigns had been subject to various constraints including duration. Despite all the prohibitions and restrictions, nearing the election date, it turned out that there was a growing chance for Ecevit's RPP to defeat Demirel's JP.⁵⁹ However, the main question was whether either party would poll enough to win an absolute majority, for Turkey urgently needed political stability and economic regularity. To the dismay of the many, the elections of October 1973 produced a complicated parliamentary arithmetic with seven parties represented in the Assembly, none having won an absolute majority (*See Appendix A*). This arithmetical composition thus made coalition or minority governments inescapable.

The RPP emerged as the strongest party with 185 seats, polling 33.3% of the popular vote. The Reliance Party (RP) with the votes siphoned off from the RPP could only poll 5.3 percent. After many years of electoral disappointments, the Republicans were able to constitute the largest group in the assembly with 41 percent of the parliamentary seats. They were bound to fail in forming a government of their own, however.

On the other hand, the votes on the right were severely fragmented while the JP lost nearly 16 percent of its gain in the previous

⁵⁹ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 316.

general elections and peripheral minor parties gathered relatively significant support. It was in a way an election defeat for Demirel's party as it had obtained 46.5 percent of the votes cast in 1969. The Justice Party this time gained only 149 seats with 29.8 percent of the popular vote. The Democrat Party, founded in 1970 by the dissidents from the JP, received 45 seats with just under 12 percent of the votes. Erbakan's National Salvation Party (NSP), successor to the National Order Party which had been dissolved by court order in 1972, obtained 49 seats in the Assembly. Moreover, the neofascist Nationalist Action Party (NAP) under the leadership of Alparslan Türkeş, a key ex-military figure in the 1960 military coup, entered the Parliament with 3.4 percent of the popular vote. The increased support for the National Salvation and National Action parties was not solely associated with their emphasis on rightist strands that mobilized the national sentiment and the hatred of the West. As Dodd points out, it was also partly due to the:

Small traders' and the small businessmen's distress at the economic effects of big business, the fear of the incipient power of the unions, dislike for arrogant and unhelpful bureaucracy, and the close attachment to Islam.⁶⁰

Moreover, the proportional representation practiced in the elections certainly assisted in increasing the number of parliamentary contingents of these two parties, the NSP and the NAP. It is therefore arguable that these two parties would not have gained seats under a majority or semi-majority system.

⁶⁰ Cletet H. Dodd, *Democracy and Development in Turkey*. (Beverly: The Eothen Press, 1979), 109.

3.3. Post-Election Arguments:

Despite the fact that the recent percentage of votes of the RPP were still below those of the elections of the 1950s, the Republican votes had in fact risen by over one million since the 1969 elections, marking about a six percent increase.⁶¹ The electoral result of the 1973 elections brings in the question of what actually caused the upsurge of the Republican votes. The ideology had been and still was the left of center. Some might argue that it was the change of leadership and the new image that made all the difference. Others might claim that the ideology was better upheld following the change of leadership within the party. Furthermore, the rest might attribute the electoral increase simply to the fragmentation of the conservative votes. It seems clear that the rise in the RPP vote is closely associated with all the above arguments while the extent of contribution of each remains a matter of speculation. However, a further look into the socioeconomic changes of the period as well as the new party policy may give us a broader picture to better understand how the RPP increased its electoral appeal in 1973.

3.4. Socioeconomic Changes and the Republicans

From 1963 to 1971, Turkish industry grew at an approximate yearly rate of nine percent.⁶² The economic boom and industrialization of the 1960s, coupled with rapid population growth, had an extensive impact on the

⁶¹ Hakan Tartan, *Son Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* [The Last Republican People's Party] (Ankara: Verso Yayıncılık, 1992), 8.

⁶² Irvin Cemil Schick and Ertuğrul Ahmet Tonak, trans. and ed., *Geçiş Sürecinde Türkiye* [Turkey in Transition] (İstanbul: Belge Yayıncılık, 1990), 63.

socioeconomic structure of the 1970s. The emergence of homegrown industry generated a serious labor recruitment drive. Newly emerging industrial sectors had an acute labor shortage in big cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Adana. Furthermore, agriculture became more automated and those people who afforded the machinery increased their wealth significantly. On the other hand, farm laborers were left with no option but shift into industry or service. The emergence of automation in agriculture disturbed power relationships and social systems in the countryside. As a result, Turkey in the late 1960s and the early 1970s staged a much larger scale migration from the countryside to the big cities than in the 1950s. "Between 1960 and 1970, the city population of Turkey increased by five million, reaching 39 percent of the total population."⁶³ The migrants, resentful of a lack of opportunities in agriculture and enticed by the attraction of the new industries, moved to big cities in search for greater economic opportunities. Unfortunately, as Zürcher points out, "only a minority of the migrants found regular work in the new industries."⁶⁴ The majority had to do low-paid menial work without any social security or they worked in temporary jobs. The migration phenomenon introduced a new awareness of the city life and its natural complications in the eyes of those who had left their ancestral villages. The new dwellers had to live in the outskirts of the big cities, the shantytowns of *Gecekondu* (literally, 'built at night'). The inhabitants

⁶³ Schick, *Türkiye*. 64.

⁶⁴ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 283.

of the *gecekondu* neighborhoods were deprived of any kind of infrastructure; nevertheless, their number increased at an uncontrollable pace. The city life was harsh and certainly the *gecekondus* did not make it any easier. As Zürcher points out, the people in the shantytowns were “upwardly mobile and integration oriented” and they made “quite use- of the competition between the parties before elections to extract promises.”⁶⁵ As the number of low-income neighborhoods continued to grow in big cities, the electoral importance of these areas grew to be substantial.

Consequently, the RPP shifted its electoral appeal to urban lower classes and to the more modern sectors of the peasantry. This meant that the RPP had changed its social bases of electoral support. In return, the low-income groups, troubled by the high cost of living in urban areas, welcomed the welfare state policy and became increasingly interested in the pronouncements of the Republican left of center ideology which capitalized on class based appeals. “The urban poor mostly wanted practical social welfare more than the promises of total change forecast by new ideologies.”⁶⁶ As for the more modern sectors of the peasantry, rural development increased the appeal among the villagers towards the RPP’s social reform program.

⁶⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 283.

⁶⁶ Dodd, *Democracy*. 133.

Since rural development entailed the commercialization of agriculture, the transformation of share-croppers into wage laborers, and an increasing inequality of income, it [was] especially in those developed villages that the potential for class voting and issue-oriented politics was greatest.⁶⁷

Özbudun is of the opinion that the RPP's rise was due to "changes in the social characteristics of the electorate."⁶⁸ The voters became mainly concerned with concrete benefits in return for their votes. They came to "perceive competitive elections as a powerful means to increase socioeconomic equality and to promote their material interests."⁶⁹ In other words, provincial socioeconomic development weakened party loyalties and made class based political participation more attractive. After all, "among the more modernized sectors of the lower classes (especially urban) one observes a disenchantment with the conservative economic policies of the JP and a growing interest in the left of center RPP."⁷⁰ To elaborate the RPP's voting correlation with provincial socioeconomic development, Dodd⁷¹ uses a socioeconomic analysis in which he argues that in 1973 the JP did best in provinces with high rural development, regardless of the level of urban development, whereas the RPP did well in provinces with high urban development regardless of

⁶⁷ Ergun Özbudun, *Social Change and Participation in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 174.

⁶⁸ Özbudun, "Turkey", 347.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁷⁰ Özbudun, *Social*. 220.

⁷¹ Dodd, *Democracy*. 130.

rural development. Then the question becomes whether the election results support these arguments. They in fact do:

As Ayata⁷² points out, the biggest victory was in Trakya (Thrace). The RPP increased its voting at an average of 11.6 percent. Trakya was an agricultural region with more modern sectors of the peasantry in comparison to the rest of the country. Likewise, the increase in the Marmara and Mediterranean regions was 10 percent and 7.3 percent respectively. The RPP polled at an increasing rate in cities with over 120,000 population while in those cities with over 400,000 population, it obtained about 40 percent of the votes cast. In İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, and Adana, the largest cities of Turkey, the average increase in the RPP's voting was 12.25 percent. In some neighborhoods of these cities the RPP more than doubled its vote between 1969 and 1973. In the shantytowns of İstanbul, the increase of the RPP vote was 26 percent. The Republicans had received 21.8 percent of the votes cast in these low-income neighborhoods (*Eyüp, Gaziosmanpaşa, and Zeytinburnu*) in 1969 and in 1973 they gained 47.5 percent. In İzmir, the support for the RPP had been 22.6 percent from the shantytowns in 1969. In contrast, it rose to 44.2 percent in 1973, marking a 21 percent increase. Moreover, the support for the Republicans increased in those areas with a high number of industrial workers such as Zonguldak. The increase was nine percent from the previous elections.

⁷² Ayata, *CHP*. 91.

It is important to note that the RPP managed to siphon off *Alevi* (Turkish Shiites) votes from the Unity party, which accounted for a 7.7 percent increase since the last elections. The *Alevi*s are believed to constitute between 15 and 20 percent of the population and known for their traditional support for secularism in Turkey.⁷³ In this regard, they historically felt closer to the Republicans, zealous advocates of secularism in Turkey. However, with the emergence of the Unity party, the RPP had marginally lost touch with the areas of the large *Alevi* populations in eastern-central Turkey. There is evidence to conclude that as the Unity party declined following its parliamentary experience in 1969, the RPP reaffirmed its position among the *Alevi*s. As Özbudun points out:

That the RPP substantially increased its vote in 1973 in the eastern-central region, where the *Alevi*s are largely concentrated, suggests that a majority of the *Alevi* voters returned to the RPP fold after a brief experiment with their own party.⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier, in order to obtain a broader picture as to how the RPP increased its vote in 1973, one must examine its new policies in addition to the socioeconomic changes of the period. The leadership had been changed prior to the elections, but the ideology still remained the left of center. Was it simply the change in the party leadership that made all the difference? Certainly not.

The RPP had moved to the left following the appearance of the

⁷³ Özbudun, "Turkey," 351.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Turkish Labor Party (TLP) in Turkish politics in the mid-1960s. Based on the potential of any fragmentation in either the left or the right, the governing-oriented parties that face a possibility of losing support among their strongholds tend to experience either a centripetal or centrifugal move dependent on the stance of the threat.⁷⁵ The TLP had posed a threat to the Republicans in that the TLP could in fact appeal to the urban intellectuals who then constituted the RPP's traditional stronghold. "Thus, the TLP, despite its negligible size, did effect a switch from centripetal to centrifugal competition."⁷⁶ Accordingly, the pronouncements of the Republicans were rather radical and somewhat meant for understanding by the more educated. However, in 1973, the TLP, dissolved by the Constitutional Court, was no longer a threat to the RPP. "The centrifugal drive which had started for the RPP in the mid-1960s as a response to the appearance of the TLP on its left seemed to have stabilized, and the party settled on a distinctively moderate course."⁷⁷ In this respect, there is significant difference between the left of center programs of the 1960s and those of the early 1970s. Although the left of center ideology remained secure going into the 1973 elections, it was not as radical as it had been in the late 1960s. This may also be

⁷⁵ Ergun Özbudun, "The Turkish Party System: Institutionalization, Polarization, and Fragmentation" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no.2 (April 1981): 231.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 233.

due to the fact that the RPP assumed a social democratic charter as a member of the Socialist International.

It was evident that the Republicans rejected elitism trying to move away from the tutelary and paternalistic posture of the past towards a people's party image. Dodd conducts a survey of the Republican principles of the 1970's and concludes that the RPP lead "great stress on the participation of the villages in their own development, of workers in their factories and civil servants in their offices."⁷⁸ The pronouncements of the RPP were relatively moderate displaying a centripetal alignment. While frankly recognizing the existence of socioeconomic classes in society, it promised a welfare state and an assurance of class interests in a non-Marxist approach. Democracy and social justice were of utmost priority and restrictions on individual and group freedoms were to be lifted. Land reform was carefully elaborated to achieve a standard understanding that a working farmer should own enough land to make a living for himself and his family. The farmers, wealthy or poor, were promised that they would no longer be neglected. There was a remarkable effort to ensure that the content of the Republican program would not only address those with higher education, but also those with no education.

In this and in other respects, the RPP [had] learned that its chief rival's [JP] ability to mobilize the electorate derives not just from the 'exploitation' of ignorance but often from genuine helpfulness based on a closer understanding of the predicaments in which ordinary people often found themselves. The initiative from people was now all-important.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Dodd, *Democracy*. 113.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The Republican People's Party managed to combine the ideological support with the aspirations and expectations of the urban low-income groups and of the modern peasantry in 1973. The socioeconomic changes of the period assisted a great deal in increasing the electoral appeal of the RPP. The results of the local elections held on December 9, 1973, confirm these arguments in that the RPP increased its vote to 39.5 percent and won 32 municipalities out of 67 provincial capitals, including all of the four largest cities (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana) and those that traditionally had been the strongholds of the Democrats.⁸⁰

3.5. Canny Post-Election Negotiations: A Marriage of Convenience

The polarized parliamentary composition of 1973 with seven parties represented in the assembly displayed an arithmetic that could only be resolved through negotiations. There were three basic solutions: a coalition government, a minority government or a national coalition. Influenced by the military authorities, President Korutürk called for a national coalition. After all, any possible rightwing coalition could rekindle political extremism and violence once again.⁸¹ Despite all the joint efforts of the President and the military from behind the scenes to keep the politicians in line with the goals of the 1971 military ultimatum, the two major political parties did not subscribe to the reiterated calls for a national coalition. Consequently, negotiations to form a coalition

⁸⁰ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 321.

⁸¹ Dodd. *Crisis*. 17.

government were long-drawn-out and very tedious. Finally, three months after the elections, the RPP and the NSP agreed to form a somewhat bizarre coalition. To many people, it was an incongruous union in that the Republicans were firmly secularist in tradition whereas the explicitly Islamic oriented Salvationists were intensely opposed to the principle of secularism in political life. The NSP's ideology combined Islamist morals and values with strongly anti-socialist sentiments. However, the two parties shared some common attitudes as well as an interest in making an alliance. First of all, it would not be mistaken to argue that it was a coalition of convenience for both parties, provided that the parliamentary arithmetic was very complicated. The RPP had been out of office for quite some time and it was a unique chance for the Salvationists to enjoy the advantages of taking part in the government. Furthermore, as Sartori argues, as a religious party, the NSP could "freely float along the left-right dimension precisely because its identifiers [were] interested only in the religious payoffs of whatever alliance [paid]."⁸² Another way of explaining the underlying motive for such a union could be to argue that Islam and Socialism are not necessarily as incompatible as it may seem. Islam lays great emphasis on community and the general interest. Its care for the needy and advocacy for brotherhood promotes the principle of social security and welfare. Like social democracy, Islam rejects unrestricted capitalist enterprise; yet, it

⁸² Sartori Giovanni, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 340.

recognizes private property. "The desire to create a moral society is an Islamic as well as a socialist objective."⁸³ Dodd⁸⁴ also believes that Muslim tradition would support a moderate socialism, which would not lean too much towards Marxism and libertarianism. Most immediately, both parties aimed to broaden the freedoms and liberties in the name of extensive social justice and to restore Turkey's dignity and independence by avoiding commitment to the capitalist and imperialist western world. They both believed in the need for rapid and balanced economic development through domestic industrial and business impetus.⁸⁵ Consequently, the two historically-alien parties prepared an ambitious coalition protocol which covered all shared issues of interest described above. Ayata⁸⁶ argues that the coalition protocol was the first serious program that aimed to deal with problems of democracy in the country. As a matter of fact, the first thing the RPP-NSP coalition government accomplished was granting a general pardon (amnesty) for political prisoners and common offenders. It was the first step to establish a democratic society equal to that of the western world. The second issue on the agenda was the opium production. Although Turkey did not have a drugs problem and the opium production generated a substantial income, the American government, severely struggling with

⁸³ Dodd, *Crisis*. 17.

⁸⁴ Dodd, *Democracy*. 91.

⁸⁵ Kedourie, *Politics*. 134.

⁸⁶ Ayata, *CHP*. 93.

the use of hard drugs by the end of the 1960s, threatened to cut off financial aid to Turkey. Consequently, the interim government of Nihat Erim banned the growing of poppies under the increasing pressure of Washington in 1972. The decision was not only a serious economic blow to the peasantry in western Anatolia, but also an unpleasant subordination to the American government. It was the general perception of the people that the American national interests had dominated the Turkish ones. "This decision became the symbol of Turkey's subservience to America"⁸⁷ and the coalition government was determined to reverse the decision to restore Turkey's dignity and independence. Two months after the government was formed, Ecevit allowed the cultivation of opium poppies in six provinces in western Anatolia, challenging the general loyalty to Uncle Sam. Despite the fact that the decision created American irritation, in the eyes of the vast majority of Turks, Ecevit had freed Turkey from imperialist ties and gained prestige as well as trust. Certainly, this was not the only case that placed Turkish-American relations on shaky ground. Ecevit's popularity was also tarnished by his keen interest to "reorientate Turkish foreign policy towards Europe (the EC and the Scandinavian countries ruled by the socialists.)"⁸⁸ Furthermore, under the influence of Erbakan's NSP, the government desired to have better ties with the Gulf countries. It was hoped that Turkish-Arab cooperation could lessen the impact of the oil

⁸⁷ Kedourie, *Politics*. 135.

⁸⁸ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 290.

crisis of 1973-74 on the economy. The efforts proved futile, for "Turkey's industry was not export-oriented and there was little tradition of trade with the Arab peninsula."⁸⁹

The most serious crisis of foreign relations took place under the very same government. The Cyprus conflict had been a very complicated issue for previous governments in Turkey since the Greek military established a junta government in Athens in 1967. The Greek ambition of annexing the island flared up after Brigadier Joannides came to power in Greece in 1973. The military government of Joannides dismissed a federal solution of the conflict, rejecting the idea of Turkish co-islanders having equal status in a republic of Cyprus. Instead, it plotted a *coup d'état* to overthrow the Cypriot President Makarios on July 15, 1974 and afterwards proclaimed *enosis* (union with Greece). The Treaty of Zurich in 1960, signed by three guarantor states (Turkey, Great Britain and Greece), had established a constitutional order and bi-national republic on the island and the military coup meant the subversion of the Treaty. Consequently, Ecevit's government called upon the other guarantor, England for joint action to restore the *status quo* and to rescue the rights of self-determination of the Turkish Cypriots on the island. "However, the British Labor Government, professing great faith in the emollient and healing powers of diplomacy, absolutely refused to join Turkey"⁹⁰ against the subversion of the treaty by Greece

⁸⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey*. 291.

⁹⁰ Kedourie, *Politics*. 135.

through a *coup d'état*. The Turkish government was determined to act independently and show the rest of the world that Turkey would do anything to not only restore its self-determination on issues of national interests, but also to grant the mere right to the Turkish Cypriots to be free from Greek domination. It was a top-priority objective of the coalition protocol to reestablish Turkey's dignity and self-determination in the international arena and this was a unique chance. Facing international pressure and possible isolation, as well as an American arms embargo, Ecevit sent the Turkish troops to the aid of the Turkish Cypriots on July 20, 1974. The second offensive on 14 August following the continuation of the communal violence came to an end partitioning the island with about 40 percent of the land under Turkish control. The military action authorized by the Ecevit and Erbakan coalition left a legacy of unresolved conflicts on the agenda of the foreign affairs for the ensuing governments, while ensuring the constitutional rights of the Turkish minority in Cyprus in accordance with the Treaty of Zurich.

Military intervention greatly added to Ecevit's stature and popularity. However, it also exerted a negative influence on the fortunes of the coalition. It became fairly clear soon after the intervention that the two-party coalition was coming to an end. There was always a factor of resentment and jealousy, as well as a competition as to who would reap the fruits of victories. The personal leadership rivalry and political complications burst to the surface following the soaring popularity of

Ecevit. "Personal relations between the leaders broke down in September that year and so, a little later, did the government coalition."⁹¹

Ecevit resigned on September 18, 1974, while his popularity was still at great heights. "The leadership of the RPP ended its alliance with the NSP in the hope of either an early general election or a coalition with the Democratic Party."⁹² The RPP hoped for early elections in order to capitalize on Ecevit's popularity over the Cyprus issue. However, the plans failed, for other parties, especially the JP under Demirel, did not intend to allow the RPP to savor an absolute majority in the parliament after an early polling and, hence, were determined to avoid cooperation with the RPP. Therefore, unfruitful negotiations lasted a long time. The failed attempts to form an RPP coalition were followed by various attempts to form a caretaker government.

On November 12, 1974, Sadi Irmak, a professor of medicine who had been a member of the parliament in 1943, was appointed by the President to form an above party administration. However, Irmak's attempt to run such a dictated government came to an end when his administration failed to receive a vote of confidence in the parliament. Neither Ecevit nor Demirel would give support to Irmak's cabinet, as they both wanted to exploit the present political turmoil to their own political advantages.⁹³ Despite his resignation on 29 November, he had to

⁹¹ Dodd, *Crisis*. 18.

⁹² Ayata, *CHP*. 93.

⁹³ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 333.

remain in office until 31 March 1975, mainly because the party leaders in the Assembly could not come up with a government proposal. Turkey was in no state to continue without a government, for “it was a time of sharpened economic crisis with inflation running at thirty percent.”⁹⁴

3.6. The Nationalist Front Coalition: The RPP Out of Office

Eventually, at the end of March 1975, the JP under the aegis of Demirel formed a coalition of the Right. As the JP did not win enough seats to form a government on its own and was likely to fail to win an absolute majority in the Assembly in early polling, it was forced to depend on the small parties of the right. After all, it was hoped that Ecevit’s popularity would diminish in time. Demirel lured small parties into this grand coalition by marked generosity in the award of ministerial posts. The nationalist front was composed of the Justice Party (JP), the National Salvation Party (NSP), the Republican Reliance Party (RRP) and the Nationalist Action Party (NAP), each having portfolios of sixteen, eight, four, and two respectively. All parties to the coalition made very efficient use of their governmental positions not only to “colonize the ministries they had been allocated by replacing existing personnel with those of their own political persuasion,”⁹⁵ but also to infiltrate important governmental agencies. The process of politicizing the bureaucracy was unrestricted and, as Heper argues, “never before in Turkish political development had the civil servants been shuffled in such an arbitrary

⁹⁴ Dodd, *Crisis*. 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

fashion.”⁹⁶ The question of whether these parties were actually congruous in terms of their political ambitions, attitudes, and sentiments can be answered succinctly by referring to Kedourie’s argument below.

The short-term opportunism and political ambitions constituted the underlying motive for all the parties that made up the nationalist front coalition, regardless of their political incongruity.

This kind of short-term opportunism practiced by all parties made the parliamentary and democratic politics an affair of *combinaciones, ad hoc* and *pro tem*, in which it is difficult to discern any principle except that of holding power for its own sake, and at any price.⁹⁷

Although the motives and the political attitudes of the coalition partners varied in many issues, to the detriment of desired coalition harmony, they all agreed on one major issue. It was:

What they saw as the very restrictive attitudes and even positive obduracy of the Constitutional Court and the Council of State, both of which continued to be regarded by the right as bastions of the [Republican] People’s Party mentality rather than as upholders of the values of the liberal and democratic system.⁹⁸

The nationalist front government, established to prevent a possible RPP government and to provide political advantages to each coalition partner, provoked ideological polarization not only in the Turkish party system, but also in governmental institutions that regulated the society. The civil service became an arena of political rivalry. As a

⁹⁶ Metin Heper, “Recent Instability in Turkish Politics: End of a Monocentrist Policy” (sic.) *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol.1 no.1, 136.

⁹⁷ Kedourie, *Politics*. 136.

⁹⁸ Dodd, *Crisis*. 19.

direct result, "growing polarization was accompanied by increasing political violence and terrorism engaged in by small but well-organized groups on the extreme left and the extreme right."⁹⁹ The maintenance of law and order was seriously threatened as the police force grew to be politicized. Furthermore, the scarcity of foreign exchange and the high price of oil following the OPEC crisis in 1973-4 put the economy in the throes of increasing difficulties as inflation became uncontrolled. However, the nationalist front, too busy offering political awards to their supporters, did very little to stop the increasing political and social unrest in the country. "Political cleavages tended to politicize and reinforce dormant ethnic (*Turkish versus Kurdish*) and sectarian (*Sunni versus Alevi*) cleavages."¹⁰⁰ Blind and deaf to all political and social outcries, the coalition partners continued to capitalize on vote-catcher policies. The Republican proposal to lower the voting age to 18 and to provide health and unemployment benefits for all workers was considered a high vote-catcher and was soon adopted by the Nationalist Front. Moreover, reducing the price of artificial fertilizers was hoped to appeal to the rich landowners, who would bring along the votes of peasants in the countryside. Owing to these vote-catcher policies, "standards of fair competition fell significantly and there was a corresponding increase in politics of outbidding."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Dodd, *Crisis*. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Özbudun, "System," 233.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The partial Senate elections held in October 1975 was a harbinger of the 1977 general elections. The RPP increased its percentage of votes from 35.4 percent to 41.4 percent.¹⁰² The JP seemed to recover some of its losses in the 1973 elections at the expense of the small parties. The National Salvation Party and the Democratic Party sustained severe losses. The NSP, which enjoyed the greatest coalition potential, had done well in the share-out of the governmental posts by participating in two different coalitions. Nevertheless, the Senate election results represented an absolute setback for the NSP. It was not so surprising that the NSP lost its appeal in a country that relies heavily on its secularist reforms, especially when the JP seemed to regain its strength in the countryside. Likewise, the support for the Democratic Party, composed of the dissidents of the JP, seriously declined when the JP regained the strongholds of the traditional democrats who were previously displeased with the JP's policies. The results of the partial Senate elections reaffirmed that Ecevit's popularity was very high and the Republican appeal was on the rise. Consequently, "the nationalist front did everything to prevent early polling"¹⁰³ and lasted until the 1977 parliamentary elections.

¹⁰² Ayata, *CHP*. 93.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

THE RISE BEFORE THE FALL

4.1. Turkey and the RPP before the 1977 General Elections:

Going into the general elections in 1977, Turkey was faced with many urgent social problems. Between 1970 and 1975, the population grew by 2.5 percent with a 4.2 percent urbanization rate. Furthermore, from 1970 to 1976, according to the World Development Report of the World Bank, the average growth rate per annum in agriculture and in industry was 4.9 percent and 9.5 percent respectively. Both rates were nearly three times as much as those experienced in industrialized countries. However, the rapid population growth, together with unplanned urbanization, coupled with agricultural and industrial bloom, brought complicated economic problems. According to the State Planning Organization (*Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı*), the main goal was to attain a seven percent increase in National Income per annum. Even if this growth rate had been achieved in terms of income per capita, it would have still meant only a four percent annual increase, given that the population was growing at the same time at an average of nearly 3 percent.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, between 1975 and 1977, the total of Turkey's imports exceeded its exports total by 10.5 billion US dollars. Inflation became more

¹⁰⁴ Cahit Talas, *Türkiye'nin Açıklamalı Sosyal Politika Tarihi* [A Detailed Sociopolitical History of Turkey] (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), 51.

accentuated while the upsurge of unemployment was uncontrollable.¹⁰⁵ In the same period, the Nationalist Front Government borrowed seven million US dollars through high interest short-term loans.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, "short term, high interest loans, the printing of money and other specimens of financial mismanagement, occasioned by the desire to attract or reward supporters"¹⁰⁷ caused the economy to come to the brink of a breakdown. It is significant to mention that one of the main reasons for "the economy [being] in increasing difficulties [was] the scarcity of foreign exchange and the high price of oil which OPEC had engineered in 1973-4."¹⁰⁸ The outcome was the devaluation of the currency, major deficits in the international trade balance and successive increases in the price of goods and services with the attendant social unrest. In the face of the growing economic and social impasse, as Ahmad¹⁰⁹ points out, the members of the government continued to make statements falsely portraying a positive picture. The result, he concludes, was widespread pessimism and cynicism. Consequently, regardless of the name and nature of any future government, there existed two major problems to deal with, a collapsing economy and growing political polarization and violence.

¹⁰⁵ Schick, *Türkiye*. 72-73.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 358.

¹⁰⁷ Kedourie, *Politics*. 138.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 346.

While Turkey portrayed a troubled picture before the 1977 general elections, were the Republicans trouble-free? Did they have any intra-party conflict or were they absolutely harmonious? What sorts of re-organizational changes did the RPP have to undergo?

When Ecevit assumed the leadership of the party in 1972, the common Republican desire was to reunite with the electorate. The majority of the Republicans firmly believed that the RPP had to refine itself through elaborating its political ideology and replacing its out-dated staff with contemporary thinkers. To what extent the Republicans successfully expounded on their political sentiments would be a matter of argument, as well as speculation. However, the RPP had staged a number of resignations and re-appointments since May 1972. To name a few, Kemal Satır, a top-level party member known to be İnönü's close associate, resigned on 28 July 1972. Convened on 13 March 1973, the RPP's group in the parliament decided not to participate in the presidential election, endorsing Ecevit's motion. Disagreeing with the group decision, the Secretary-General, Kamil Kırıkoğlu, and 32 Republican members of the parliament voted in the presidential voting. The disagreement was regarded as defiance of the party leader and on 4 April 1973, Kamil Kırıkoğlu and the Central Executive Committee resigned.¹¹⁰ Following this chain of resignations, the Party Assembly elected Orhan Eyüboğlu, a close associate and strong supporter of

¹¹⁰ Hikmet Bila. *CHP Tarihi* [The History of the RPP] (Ankara: Doruk Matbaası, 1978), 60.

Ecevit, as the new Secretary-General and re-established the Central Executive Committee.

4.1.1. The 1974 Statute Congress: The Revision of the Party By-law.

In the party congress of 28 June 1974, better known as the Statute Congress (*Tüzük Kongresi*), the Republicans adopted new principles, which called for restructuring the party administration. The new statute changes aimed to structure the party organization in accordance with the social democratic nature representing the recent socioeconomic transformations. Moreover, they aimed to develop intra-party democracy. In other words, the new principles were adopted both to reflect the left of center ideology onto the party statute and to minimize the conflicts between the party's General Headquarters and the provincial branches. Until then, complying with the Political Parties Law (Law #648, 13 April 1965), the Republican People's Party had two administrative bodies, the Party Assembly (*Parti Meclisi*) and the Central Executive Committee (*Merkez Yönetim Kurulu*). The Party Assembly was originally made up of 40 members elected by the party congress. The Republican Party leader had a very influential position in the election process. The Party Assembly was the second highest decision-making body after the party congress. The Central Executive Committee was the executive organ responsible for carrying out the decisions of the party congress and the Party Assembly. It was also in charge of developing, strengthening and inspecting the party organizations throughout the country. It comprised the Secretary-General and 14 members.

In accordance with the new principles, one-third of the leaders of the provincial organizations together with four representatives from the youth and women's branches were admitted to the Party Assembly, bringing the number of its members to 67.¹¹¹ Traditionally, the Party Assembly used to comprise the members of parliament who resided in Ankara, as well as the party elite who once played a role in party administration.¹¹² With the increase in the number of members of the party assembly, the Republicans pursued the goal of "bringing the voice of Anatolia, the voice of party organization"¹¹³ into the decision making. It was an attempt to approach the party base and make use of the possible contributions of provincial branches.

Furthermore, the 47th article of the party statute of 1974 enabled the Party Assembly to supervise the Secretary-General and the Central Executive Committee. More importantly, the Party Assembly was given the authority to relieve the Secretary-General and the Central Executive Committee of their duty by the absolute majority of its members.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the authority of the Central Executive Committee was

¹¹¹ Bila, *CHP*. 61.

¹¹² Suna Kili, *1960-1975 Döneminde Cumhuriyet Halk Partisinde Gelişmeler* [Developments in the Republican People's Party 1960-1975] (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayını, 1976), 418.

¹¹³ Arsev Bektaş, *Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Liderler Oligarşisi: CHP ve AP (1961-1980)* [Leadership Oligarchy in Democratization Process: RPP and JP, 1961-1980] (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 1993), 58.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

strengthened by the articles 87 & 88, which provided the executive organ with the prerogative to determine the nominee candidates for the Grand National Assembly, Provincial General Assemblies (*il Genel Meclisi*), Mayoralties and Town Councils (*Belediye Meclisi*).¹¹⁵ All these organizational reforms were modeled after Western European Social Democratic parties, “particularly the Social Democratic Party of Sweden (SAP)”¹¹⁶ The statute of the RPP had undergone a series of long-due changes in search for intra-party democracy and structural modernization. However, the advocates of these changes had perhaps overlooked the possibility of long drawn-out sessions to come to a single decision.

4.1.2. The 22nd Ordinary Congress: Attempts to Enhance Intra-Party Democracy.

Just about five months after the Statute Congress, the RPP held its 22nd Ordinary Party Congress on 14 December 1974. The 22nd congress was very significant in that the change in the election of the Party Assembly system adopted then allowed the ossified disputes to emerge at a time the Republicans were practically least prepared to bear. The new election system required the provincial party leaders to choose the new members of the Party Assembly from five different lists prepared by the party leader, Secretary-General, women’s & youth branches as well as deputy group leaders. With the new system, staying neutral, the party

¹¹⁵ CHP Tüzük, 1974 [The 1974 RPP Statute].

¹¹⁶ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 46.

leader would not use his influence in determining the Party Assembly members. The change aimed to democratize the Party Assembly election system.¹¹⁷ There is no doubt that the change was ideal in philosophy; however, within the RPP, it was doomed to cause turbulent opposition. Chronically, any attempt to soothe the intra-party tensions or to enhance intra-party democracy within the RPP had created unintentional opposition by those Republicans whose privileges or standings were at stake. Moreover, the definition of democracy, or better yet justice, was so mercurial among the Republicans that any new principle or ideology was exploited in a way to maximize their own political ambitions. Consequently, conflicts of interest generated intransigent intra-party cliques that became the well-known characteristic of the Republican People's Party. To elaborate, this good-willed change came to be perceived and hence utilized by the Republicans in a way that was least expected. It turned out that the result of the election of the new Party Assembly by the provincial party leaders excluded many members of the previous PA who were known to be close supporters of the party leader, Ecevit. As a result, creating a tumultuous opposition, those old members who failed to be re-elected expressed their resentment in *Milliyet* daily on 17 December 1974 as "the Party Leader should have had some influence or authority. He could have said 'I don't want these people in the PA'."¹¹⁸ On the other hand, some of the

¹¹⁷ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

provincial party leaders, who had been given the chance to determine the members of the new PA with the intention of enhancing intra-party democracy, took advantage of the privilege to the extent of individual negotiations to facilitate their political aspirations.¹¹⁹ In the mean time, the party leadership of Ecevit was reaffirmed in the congress and the RPP set off with the same leader but with a renewed Party Assembly. The new composition of the Party Assembly changed the distribution of political influence and the balance of power among the rival groups within the party. It was apparent that the concomitant resentment with the changed status quo would yield increasing altercations, which could very well prevent the Republicans to carry on in accord.

In the early spring of 1976, it became apparent that the RPP had lost its harmony due to cliquishness within its ranks. Four major groups, which had disputing sentiments about the party's future owing to the new distribution of intra-party influence, emerged. These were Deniz Baykal's group, Ali Topuz's group, the Pro-Headquarters group and the Left Wing.¹²⁰ Following the death of a member in the CEC, the competition among the rival groups to get their own candidates elected to the empty chair became uncontrollable. Bektaş¹²¹ argues that the underlying motive for the fierce rivalry was not due to a distinct conflict of opinion. Rather, it was a matter of balance of power within the party. After the

¹¹⁹ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 89.

¹²⁰ Tartan, *Son*. 8.

¹²¹ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 91.

election on 7 March 1976, the losing side composed of five members of the CEC, later known to be the 5s¹²² (5'ler), resigned marking the beginning of vehement disputes. From this point onward, on every issue ranging from trivial administrative procedures to general party policies, the RPP hosted a series of uncompromising groups of internal opposition.

Internal bickering and competition for power became so rampant in May that a general meeting was offered to discuss intra-party problems and to negotiate a common ground in order to "pursue contemporary politics."¹²³ There were severe criticisms that the party had failed to establish a successful organizational network and that it had lost touch with the social dynamics. In a sense, the party was losing touch with workers, small tradesmen, artisans and the peasantry. It was, in a way, ironic to point out that the party was neglecting the problems and desires of the social dynamics when, in fact, the party had been ignoring the ongoing disputes and breaches of harmony within its ranks. Could the RPP possibly deal with the problems of the electorate, when it failed to deal with its own problems? In other words, could the Republicans work effectively and come up with efficient policies when they lacked efficacy?

To many Republicans, the Party Assembly, with up to 70 members, was not functional anymore and lacked the capacity to work in

¹²² Deniz Baykal, Haluk Ulman, Adil Ali Cinal, Tankut Akalın and Erol Çevikçe resigned on 8 March 1976.

harmony and come to a decision on any issue. Ecevit was also of the same opinion and, to that end, he wished to unite the executive and decision making bodies into one single, 'above-all' organ. He believed that the operational structure of the party organization was established in a way that was prone to create internal disharmony. His declaration on 3 June 1976 in the *Milliyet* daily clearly portrayed his views on the structure of the Republican party organization:

There exists a structure in our General Headquarters that is doomed to create estrangement. That is, the Party Congress elects the Party Assembly and that Party Assembly then elects the Central Executive Committee and the Secretary-General. However, from then on, the General Executive Committee and the rest of the Party Assembly become alienated from one another retiring to a distance... Furthermore, there is a question of estrangement between the General Headquarters and the party groups...The altercation between the General Headquarters and the party group is almost an eternal characteristic of the RPP.¹²⁴

In this respect, İsmail Hakkı Birler, Turan Güneş, and Tarhan Erdem prepared a motion to make necessary changes in the party bylaw to replace the bicameral system with a central one.¹²⁵

4.1.3. The 23rd Party Congress: The Invalidation of the Bicameral Administration.

The 23rd Ordinary Party Congress was held on 27 November 1976. The main agenda of the congress was meant to focus on the new party program and redesigned party statute. The party program was enriched to address the needs of the period in a more exclusive social democratic approach. The party statute, despite the fact that it had been modified just

¹²³ Tartan, *Son.* 8.

¹²⁴ Bektaş, *Liderler.* 92.

¹²⁵ Tartan, *Son.* 63.

two years ago, was revised to help resolve the intra-party crisis and enhance the decision-making process. In spite of the agenda, “the 23rd congress staged a competition for the General Secretariat.”¹²⁶ The position of the Secretary-General traditionally had a crucial significance in terms of internal distribution of power within the RPP. Until this congress, the Secretary-General used to preside over the Central Executive Committee. If the majority of the CEC comprised those party members, who belonged to the group that the Secretary-General represented, then, the Secretary-General and, consequently, the group that he represented would be more effective within the party and would have more influence over the party organization than the party leader himself.¹²⁷ Therefore, it was quite natural for the rival groups within the RPP to fully concentrate on acquiring the General Secretariat. The fierce competition among Orhan Eyubođlu, Deniz Baykal, and Turan Güneş resulted in Orhan Eyubođlu’s election for the Secretary-General.

Eventually, however, the motion, which covered the relevant organizational and administrative amendments, was brought forward and accepted. Thereafter, the RPP had a General Executive Committee (*Genel Yönetim Kurulu*) which possessed the powers of decision-making and execution. The General Executive Committee (GEC) was made up of 21 members. The party leader chaired the General Executive Committee along with the deputy group leaders and 16 other board

¹²⁶ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 92.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

members elected in the party congress. The Secretary-General was elected within the General Executive Committee by the absolute majority of its members. The Secretary-General would then select his four deputies and the general accountant of the party from the members of General Executive Committee, subject to the approbation of the party leader.¹²⁸ This was, in a sense, a constraint on the authority and leeway of the Secretary-General. As Bektaş suggests, the party leader, in accordance with the new statute, single-handedly possessed the sole authority directly presiding over the General Executive Committee, which held the ultimate powers of decision-making and execution. "This way, the powerful general secretariat became out of date, eradicating the aspect of a *Second Leader*."¹²⁹

On the other hand, by renouncing the bicameral system, the Republican People's Party returned to the central organization model that it had used 25 years ago. The change in the hierarchy and delegation of administrative power was hoped to provide internal solidarity through lessening disharmony. Moreover, the Republicans organized special work groups in order to establish better communication and to foster cooperation with the social dynamics.¹³⁰

However, the Republican leadership was so occupied with their efforts to soothe the increasing tension within the party that they

¹²⁸ Bila, *CHP*. 656.

¹²⁹ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 94.

¹³⁰ Tartan, *Son*. 12.

experienced unexpected trouble in determining their candidates for the parliamentary and senate elections. They had such difficulty with this that the RPP was almost excluded from the elections in 1977.¹³¹ It is important to note that the introduction of the General Executive Committee model was a serious attempt to increase the efficiency of the party administration at the expense of intra-party democracy. There existed no control mechanism to supervise the General Executive Committee and prevent any arbitrariness. If the party members and the General Executive Committee disagreed on an issue, then there would be no way of determining right from wrong, since there was no arbiter. In other words, there was no pre-planned process by which the two disputing sides would submit their differences to the judgment of an impartial group appointed by mutual consent or statutory provision. It appeared that the RPP with this new model was bound to face more serious internal conflicts in the ensuing days.

4.2. The 1977 General Elections: The RPP Emerges Triumphant

The results of the elections held on 5 June 1977 proved that in the eyes of the electorate, the continuous quarrelling of the coalition partners of the National Front had overshadowed the internal turmoil of the RPP. The Republicans received 41.4 percent of the popular vote, increasing their share by seven percent since 1973. However, denying the RPP a

¹³¹ Tartan, *Sen.* 24.

sufficient base for a stable hold on power, “the right was able once again to frustrate Ecevit’s best hopes to form an effective government”¹³² on his own. The RPP obtained 213 seats in the Assembly, coming very close to an absolute majority with 47.3 percent of the parliamentary seats (See *Appendix A*). In this election, the votes to the left of center reached its highest share ever, marking the triumph of the social democratic discourse. On the other side, Demirel’s JP also increased its polling by seven percent, gaining 39.6 percent of the votes cast. The JP in consequence obtained 189 seats, which constituted 42 percent of the parliamentary seats. In this regard, Dodd¹³³ makes an interesting comparison between the two parties in terms of performance versus gains. He points out that the JP increased its parliamentary contingent by 40 since the 1973 elections through increasing its percentage of votes by only 7.1 percent. In the mean time, the RPP increased its percentage of votes by eight percent but surprisingly gained only 27 extra seats.

Another interesting aspect of the 1977 parliamentary elections was that the combined percentage of the RPP-JP vote accounted for almost 90 percent of the popular vote and that Turkey was reverting to the two-party system (See *Appendix B*). Fragmentation, which was at its

¹³² Metin Heper and Jacob M. Landau, *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (London I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991), 112.

¹³³ Dodd, *Crisis*. 37.

highest in 1973, fell considerably in 1977.¹³⁴ In 1977, the electorate was centrist, whether exactly in the center or just to the left or right to the center. A national survey, sponsored by the Turkish daily—*Hürriyet* and TOTEK—a technical consultant firm, was conducted in different regions among people of varying socioeconomic backgrounds on the 1977 elections by a team of researchers under the co-direction of Üstün Ergüder and Selçuk Özgediz. The findings of this pre-election survey concluded that “26.8 percent of the respondents placed themselves at the [absolute] center, 27.7 percent left of center, and 24.6 percent right of center.”¹³⁵ It can be therefore inferred that “the electorate was distributed in a bell-shaped manner, with a single peak near the central point of the scale and the proportion declining rapidly as one moved from the center toward [extremes].”¹³⁶ Despite the increasing politicization of society and the end of consensus politics at the party level, the Turkish electorate had clustered around the center. Moreover, Özbudun argues that the tendency towards the two-party system was “distinctively stronger in the more highly developed regions of the country” and that

¹³⁴ Özbudun, “System,” 237.

¹³⁵ Üstün Ergüder, “Changing Patterns of Electoral Behavior in Turkey” (Paper presented at the Eleventh World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Moscow, Russia, August 12-18, 1979).

¹³⁶ Richard Rose and Ian McAllister, *The Loyalties of Voters: A Lifetime Learning Model* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 22.

“the combined RPP-JP vote [had] been positively correlated with the indicators of provincial socioeconomic development.”¹³⁷ Although each party strengthened its parliamentary standing, neither gained enough seats to set up a government on its own. The NSP’s votes declined by three percent and it lost half of its parliamentary contingent, obtaining only 24 seats. As Ahmad¹³⁸ suggests, this result proved that religion was not the most important factor influencing the voting behavior of the Turkish electorate. On the other hand, the Democratic Party and the Reliance Party practically lost their parliamentary relevance. However, the NAP substantially increased its share of the popular vote, almost doubling it, from 3.4 to 6.4 percent. What appeared more significant was that the NAP increased its parliamentary contingent from three to 16, more than fivefold. It is Özbudun’s argument that “the NAP siphoned off votes from the JP and attracted a large number of new voters.”¹³⁹

Confirming the analysis of the 1973 election results, Ergüder presents the major findings of the 1977 pre-election survey as follows: In ecological terms (*See Appendix C*), 64.9 percent of the metropolitan voters favored the RPP. Therefore, the Republican vote remained to be positively associated with urban population. Education proved to be another Republican identifier among the surveyed. 68.3 percent of the surveyed with either high school or university education identified

¹³⁷ Özbudun, “Turkey,” 346.

¹³⁸ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 350.

¹³⁹ Özbudun, “System,” 234.

themselves with the RP. Notably, 79 percent of the surveyed, who characterized themselves as undevout Moslems with pro-secular sentiments, classified themselves as RPP supporters. On the contrary, the identification with the JP was disposed to be stronger among the relatively more rural, less educated, and pious voters.¹⁴⁰

Moreover, the data on the occupational distribution of the party identification (*See Appendix C*) revealed that the fixed income groups, which comprise civil servants and workers, overwhelmingly favored the RPP over the JP. While 71.8 percent of civil servants supported the Republicans, 67 percent of laborers identified themselves with the RPP. In addition, professionals, entrepreneurs and businessmen who would normally reside in urban areas favored the RPP at a reasonably high rate of 48.5 percent. On the other hand, confirming the traditional voting behavior, 47.6 percent of the countryside residents, namely peasants, favored the JP over the RPP giving the Justice party a leading edge over the RPP.¹⁴¹ The findings of the national survey corresponded to the argument that fixed-income groups, in spite of their diminishing financial standings, managed to cope with rapid industrialization and identify with the industrial working class. As a result, they denied the peripheral parties of any substantial electoral hold in 1977.

¹⁴⁰ Özbudun, "Turkey," 350.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

4.2.1. Uncompromising Negotiations for Government: The 2nd Nationalist Front.

Once again, faced with a stalemate, the latest parliamentary arithmetic made minority or coalition governments inevitable. However, if there were to be a coalition government, it would be a coalition of a major party with smaller ones. Unfortunately, it had been the traditional tragedy of Turkish politics that the major parties could not make an alliance to run a government of strong and legitimate support. They preferred to be an uncompromising and vociferous opposition. As a matter of fact, it was their leadership that had “not always shown a propensity for compromise and accommodation even in the face of a grave and imminent threat to the regime.”¹⁴²

To nobody’s surprise, engaged in endless futile bickering, Ecevit and Demirel could not form a coalition to maneuver Turkey out of the present multi-fold crisis. Unreasonably and perversely obstinate, both leaders acted as if they would simply ignore the 1977 May Day demonstrations in İstanbul, which resulted in 34 dead and many shops and cars destroyed.¹⁴³ Turkish political parties continued to take action in accordance with the interests of their party leaders, disregarding the national consensus to bring an end to the economic stringency and social violence.¹⁴⁴ Eventually, on 21 June 1977, Ecevit, having the

¹⁴² Özbudun, “Crisis,” 219.

¹⁴³ Kedourie, *Politics*. 140.

¹⁴⁴ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 350.

largest number of seats in the parliament, attempted to form the minority government of Turkey with the support of the independents. However, his government, which Demirel called “an occupancy government,”¹⁴⁵ failed to receive the vote of confidence and, consequently, was forced to resign on 3 July 1977. On 21 July 1977, Demirel formed his coalition, granting prominent ministerial positions to both the NSP and NAP. This coalition government later came to be known as the Second Nationalist Front (*2nci MC*) in which the Salvationists and the Nationalists, in spite of their relatively poor electoral power, ended up with eight and five ministries respectively. The Second Nationalist Front coalition was doomed to be short-lived. Some of the moderate members of the JP soon found themselves in a state of sulky dissatisfaction with heavy reliance on and concessions made to the radical Islamists and the extreme right wing Nationalists in terms of ministerial posts.¹⁴⁶ The success of the Republicans in the Mayoral elections of 11 December 1977 was the last straw for “a number of JP moderates, who [later] formed a group to urge coalition with the RPP.”¹⁴⁷ Despite the poor electoral performance in the local elections, Demirel insisted on keeping the Second Nationalist Front government, completely ignoring the intra-party opposition and resentment towards the coalition members.

¹⁴⁵ Tartan, *Son*. 8.

¹⁴⁶ Kedourie, *Politics*. 138.

¹⁴⁷ Dodd, *Crisis*. 19.

Consequently, 11 members¹⁴⁸ of the Justice party resigned and supported the RPP in an interpellation against Demirel's government on 31 December 1977, which brought about the downfall of the government by 228 votes to 218.

4.2.2. The 3rd Ecevit Government: The Beginning of the End.

In the following days, including the defectors from the Justice Party, Ecevit managed to form a government, which depended on the combined support from the independents, the Republican Reliance Party (RRP)¹⁴⁹, and the Democratic Party (Dem.P)¹⁵⁰. The 3rd Ecevit government, better known as the 'Government of the 11s (*11'ler Hükümeti*), received the vote of confidence on 17 January 1978.

It must be noted that there were many criticisms within the Republicans not only on including the dissidents of the JP within the new government, but also on giving them 10 newly created ministries. For instance, İlyas Seçkin, an old deputy Secretary-General, was one of the many Republicans who objected to setting up a government with the defectors of the JP. Tartan reports that Seçkin complained to Ecevit in the presence of two deputy Secretary-Generals, Hasan Esat Işık and Mustafa Üstündağ, and said: "We cannot go anywhere with these men. I

¹⁴⁸ The 11 dissidents from the JP were Cemalettin İnkaya, Tuncay Mataracı, Orhan Alp, Ali Rıza Septioğlu, Şerafettin Elçi, Hilmi İşgüzar, Mete Tan, Güneş Öngüt, Mustafa Kılıç, Enver Akova and Mehmet Karaaslan.

¹⁴⁹ Turhan Feyzioğlu and Salih Yıldız joined the cabinet from the RRP.

¹⁵⁰ Faruk Sükan was given the post of ministry of state.

know eight of them very well. They are individuals who will harm us.”¹⁵¹ On the other hand, Ecevit saw it as a chance to contain the growing danger of fascism and to calm the increasing pressure from the party organization, which demanded a Republican government in power.¹⁵² However, with such a cabinet, it was out of the question for Ecevit to implement his party program. Consequently, he gave up on imposing radical measures and simply focused on efforts to bring peace and order.¹⁵³

In addition to on-going difficulties in foreign affairs with Greece over the Cyprus issue and the extent of territorial waters in the Aegean, coupled with weakened relations with the US, Ecevit's government was faced with a collapsing economy and terrifying political violence. Under these circumstances, Ecevit hoped to implement a moderate approach in relations with Greece, while reemphasizing the increased importance of firm and persistent attitude in foreign affairs. In order to cope with the deteriorating economic situation, he set forth a series of economic measures which demanded the economy to move “rather more towards the left by the promise of greater control over foreign oil and mining companies and of new land reform legislation.”¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, restoring balance to the economy required Ecevit's left-wing government

¹⁵¹ Tartan, *Son*. 17.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ahmad, *Demokrasi*. 351.

¹⁵⁴ Dodd, *Crisis*. 21.

to search for foreign aid. Primarily, arrangements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were inescapable, forcing Ecevit to implement policies that in theory did not coincide with the Republicans' political ideology. The IMF stipulated that the Turkish government had to execute expenditures-dampening policies and had to allow for the devaluation of the lira. Since the OECD had imposed the compliance of the IMF conditions for any possible external aid, Ecevit was left with no option but to accept the IMF's regulatory measures. Leading the government of a country whose economy was on the brink of collapse, the RPP cabinet had to accept all conditions set forth by the creditors "on terms with which a left-wing government could not [normally] be in sympathy, simply in order to keep Turkey afloat."¹⁵⁵ In the aftermath of such compulsory undertakings:

Ecevit successfully negotiated, *inter alia*, loans from the World Bank during 1978 and 1979 totaling some 516.5 million US. dollars, standby arrangements with the IMF for some 327 million US. dollars and loans and credits by the Turkey Consortium of the OECD amounting to 961 million dollars.¹⁵⁶

In the menacing case of growing political fury and bloodshed on the streets, the RPP government did not enforce the strict preventive measures that it did against the imminent breakdown of economy. Dodd argues that Ecevit, with a humane mindset, was "convinced that terrorism (at least from the left) derived from lack of economic opportunity."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Dodd, *Crisis*. 22.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Thus, it was believed that when the deteriorating trend in economy was averted, terrorism would be halted. However, it was crucially neglected that, even in the most optimistic case, economic measures would not harvest its returns in the short term. They were bound to prove gradually successful in the long term. In the absence of repressive policies, a number of serious violent public disorders led to bloodshed, placing the question of political violence on top of the agenda. It was particularly unnerving in Kahramanmaraş in southeastern Turkey between 22-25 December 1978. The exacerbation of sectarian cleavages came to the fore in armed clashes between Sunnis versus Alevis, who favored the right and the left respectively, claiming 109 lives and leaving 176 wounded and over 500 houses and shops vandalized.¹⁵⁸

Once again, Ecevit was forced to impose policies, with which he did not fundamentally agree, which brought about martial law in thirteen cities. In spite of the grimness of the situation, Ecevit still sought clement handling of the martial law in respective provinces. The RPP, which assumed an anti-military stance in the 1970s, opposed any role for the military in politics. In this regard, Ecevit firmly demanded that “the martial law coordinating committee respected the government’s wishes when implementing decisions, and he himself sat on the committee.”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, while still making a considerable effort to ensure impartial treatment towards political violence from both the left and right at the

¹⁵⁸ Kedourie, *Politics*. 140.

¹⁵⁹ Dodd, *Crisis*. 21.

governmental level, in the face of propagated institutional politicization, the RPP government decided to carry out a cleansing operation against those administrators previously appointed by different political parties.¹⁶⁰ It could be argued that the introduction of removing civil servants of other political persuasions was to ensure a more timely feedback of breeches of law and order to the government.

Nonetheless, as it can be presumed, in most business and military circles, the harsh economic and the mild anti-terrorist policies of the Republican People's Party caused it to wear out its welcome. In terms of the business sector, the restriction on economy and the devaluation of the currency adversely affected investments and profits of many businesses of varying scale, generating a concomitant animosity toward the RPP. Furthermore, there was a shortage of petroleum and its by-products (diesel oil, kerosene, and gasoline). Because the fuel-oil stocks were depleting, the government had put into practice the use of ration cards. The shortage of petroleum products brought about a heavy blow on agriculture and public transportation, which, in consequence, paralyzed both the rural and urban life. The restrictions imposed on the use of electricity, coupled with the shortage of foodstuffs including margarine, aggravated the social unrest and inflamed the dissatisfaction with the RPP government.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Dodd, *Crisis*. 21.

¹⁶¹ Ayata, *CHP*. 94.

As for the military, Ecevit's attitude and treatment of the military and his policies concerning military measures on political terrorism were regarded as a perturbing intrusion into the traditional running of the military. Any comment or policy that meant to constrain the political influence of the military was considered unacceptable.

4.3. The 24th Ordinary Party Congress: The Intra-Party Opposition Challenges the General Executive Committee.

Encouraged by the growing disquiet throughout the country, the RPP intra-party opposition groups rekindled the internal altercations, vehemently criticizing the new structure of party organization adopted in the 1976 Statute Congress. While the party headquarters espoused the present structure, some of the strong characters of the party including Turan Güneş, Haluk Ülman, Deniz Baykal and Ali Topuz urged a re-adoption of the system set out in the party statute of 1974.¹⁶² These party elites and their representative groups all agreed that the Party Assembly had to be reestablished. Since the foundation of the General Executive Committee as the ultimate executive body solely responsible for decision-making, the General Executive Committee chaired by the party leader had not been subjected to any administrative supervision or sanctions. The opposition claimed that in the absence of the Party Assembly, the authority and functioning of the board was arbitrary, literally bordering on political tyranny.¹⁶³ Therefore, the intra-party

¹⁶² Bektaş, *Liderler*. 64.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 96.

opposition went into the 24th Ordinary Party Congress on 25 May 1979 in the hope of changing the current party organization for the purpose of enhanced internal democracy.

The 24th Republican congress was very significant in that it was the last ordinary party congress and that Ecevit had defeated his opposition, reconsolidating his leadership. To elaborate, the motion for the amendment of the party statute prepared by the intra-party opposition was rejected by 769 to 571. The marginal difference was particularly important for it meant that the RPP was on its way to the verge of disintegration. Loudly declaring his firm stance against the united intra-party opposition, Ecevit was reelected by receiving 1218 votes out of the 1347 party delegates. Furthermore, he single-handedly prepared the list for the General Executive Committee at his own discretion. One of the striking aspects of the list was that it was generally made up of new politicians who would conceivably be more loyal to the party leader.¹⁶⁴ Ecevit was undoubtedly laying down the groundwork for a very influential party leadership.

4.4. The October 1979 Mid-term Elections: The Devastating End of the Republican Government.

The 14 October 1979 elections, which comprised the partial Senate elections and Assembly by-elections, marked the end of the RPP government. For one-third of the Senator seats and five vacancies in the

¹⁶⁴ Bektaş, *Liderler*. 96.

Parliament, mid-term elections were held in 29 provinces. Demirel's Justice Party obtained 30 out of 50 memberships in the Senate and gained five by-elections in the Assembly. It was without a doubt a devastating defeat for the Republican People's Party. In two year's time since the 1977 general elections, the RPP lost one-third of its previous electoral power, polling only 27.4 percent. The Republican votes had plummeted to its lowest-ever in 1979. Even in metropolitan centers, the RPP had suffered a 20 percent loss in votes. While the share of the Republican electoral portfolios was 58 percent in 1977 in the metropolitan cities, it dwindled to 37.9 percent in 1979.¹⁶⁵ Having failed to receive the vote of confidence from the electorate, Ecevit resigned as Prime Minister immediately.

Despite the absence of detailed studies on this election, Özbudun points out a similarity between the number of people, who had cast a ballot in 1977 and yet did not turn out in 1979, and the loss of the Republican share of the total vote in 29 provinces (*See Appendix D*). He further concludes, "the fall in the RPP vote was most likely a result of the massive abstention of the RPP voters in order to punish the poor performance of the Ecevit government."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ayata, *CHP*. 94.

¹⁶⁶ Özbudun, "Turkey," 348.

4.5. The Last Republican Congress: Towards the End of Democracy.

In the aftermath of the crashing electoral defeat, receiving the support of Orhan Eyübođlu, the ex-Secretary-General, the main intra-party opposition groups (pro-Baykal's group, pro-Topuz's group and the pro-left-wing groups) agreed to collaborate against Ecevit. Faced with multiple criticisms, Ecevit summoned the 8th Extraordinary Party Congress on 14 October 1979 to receive the confidence vote for both his leadership and the General Executive Committee.¹⁶⁷ However, under the sweltering heat of the intensified attacks from the intra-party opposition, the General Executive Committee resigned on 26 October 1979, leaving Ecevit as the only target for the internal bickering. The 8th Extraordinary Congress commenced with Ecevit's speech in which he relentlessly criticized the cliquishness of the RPP:

In our opinion, the greatest harm [to the RPP] came from the intra-party opposition which passed the limit of bearable criticism. What is important is not to bring the party to power, rather to establish power within the party...If I remain as the party leader, my administration is not going to have the Party Assembly that dates back to the 1950s...Those friends, who hold the opinion that the absence of the Party Assembly had caused the [poor] election results, are fooling themselves. In the past elections, the Party Assembly existed, but the result was still defeat.¹⁶⁸

Eventually, Ecevit was reelected as the party leader receiving the vote of confidence by 1341 yea, and 20 nay, with 4 abstentions. In the case of the election for the General Executive Committee, contrary to the 24th congress, there were two lists prepared by the general headquarters

¹⁶⁷ Hikmet Bila, *Sosyal Demokrat Süreç içinde CHP ve Sonrası* [The RPP in Social Democratic Transition and Afterwards] (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1987), 466.

¹⁶⁸ Bektaş, *Liderler*, 98.

and the intra-party opposition respectively. Ecevit made it quite clear that if the opposition list had been elected, he would have left the party leadership. Playing his last trump card, he influenced the congress and consequently, the general headquarters' list was elected by a slight margin of 723 to 604.¹⁶⁹ The result of the voting conspicuously displayed that the aggregate power of the opposition within the party had reached an authority-threatening level in that Ecevit had to manifest his influence as a last resort. No one could have thought that this was the last party congress of any kind. However, one could have predicted that with the drifting towards disintegration, the Republican People's Party was not only diminishing its electoral support, but also ruining the last remnants of its internal coherence.

Following the resignation of the RPP government on 16 October 1979, Demirel's JP came to power as a minority government. This time, however; although the NSP and NAP were not taken into coalition, Demirel still had to rely on the support of the partners of the old Nationalist Front coalitions. This was to be the last democratic government of the decade, for a military coup d'état brought the political system to a halt on 12 September 1980. In a year's time, all political parties were abolished and barred from any future political arena. The 58-year undulating political adventure of the Republican People's Party had come to an end on 15 October 1981.

¹⁶⁹ Bektaş, *Liderler*, 99.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The maxim 'left of center' was adopted shortly before the 1965 general elections by the Republican People's Party as a slogan marking a fundamental change in the ideological rhetoric of the party. However, the timing of the adoption of such a new and controversial slogan stirred ideological debate among the Republicans, which caused the electorate to believe that the RPP lacked ideological coherence. Consequently, the Republican road towards parliamentary majority was paved with frustration.

Until Ecevit became the party leader in 1972, the RPP staged a series of bitter and uncontrolled struggles for power between the conservative and progressive factions within the party. The ideological development within the RPP proceeded with significant internal confusion and disputes which, on the whole, rendered the function of the party difficult. With Ecevit hoping to discard the image of the party's own past, the transformation of the RPP in image and character took place as a response to socioeconomic changes and long-neglected intra-party dynamics. The RPP shifted its party base to include the growing working class, which had been underprivileged in the face of rapid industrialization and economic growth. This shift marked the political

recognition of the social classes and their special interests. From this point on, the RPP implemented politics based on class appeals.

The results of the 1973 elections displayed a distinct shift in the composition of the Republican vote. The RPP had obtained an upswing of electoral hold with the support from mainly the urban poor, which made up the working class. The 1973 election was also significant in that, in its aftermath, the RPP was the first party to implement the politics of compromise when such a political practice was not yet accepted as the main trend of practical politics in Turkey. The end of the military interregnum had produced a precarious democracy that remained susceptible to the possibility of other military coups. The priority of the RPP, therefore, became the defense of the democratic system; that is, making democracy work rather than implementing full-scale social democratic policies.

In another aspect, the RPP differed from its European counterparts in that it did not enjoy the backing of united trade union movements. Because unions were weak, the conditions for the emergence of a genuine working class leadership were absent. Consequently, intellectuals or other middle class radicals dominated the labor movement in Turkey. Against a background of weak trade unions and the absence of a genuine working class leadership, the RPP could not stay on a purely social democratic discourse. Furthermore, "the social democratic parties of Europe emerged from embryonic and

undifferentiated labor movements.”¹⁷⁰ On the contrary, the RPP adopted a social democratic nature in search of political identification. There is no substantial evidence to argue that it pursued the statutes of social democracy as a continuation of the struggle for political participation and democracy.

The 1977 parliamentary elections marked the triumph of the Republicans at long last. The electoral law, however, was a major barrier to social democrat ascendancy, which added to the frustration and isolation of the party and became a major source of the growing suspicion of the parliamentary channel. Moreover, the rise of the RPP was as sudden and dramatic as its subsequent shift from its social welfare policies and recent electoral base. The most damaging consequence was the devaluation of the left of center line, the collapse of social democratic pronouncement in the eyes of the masses. Instead of the promise of social change, the electorate associated left of center politics and the RPP with austerity coupled with uncontrolled inflation, an unparalleled shortage in daily necessities, and the rising tide of extremist terrorism. The present economic situation forced the Keynesian hopes into the background and gave rise to the monetarist policies of austerity. Those policies worsened the position of the urban poor, who had been already living under precarious circumstances. The working class neighborhood had formed the center of gravity of the RPP during the

¹⁷⁰ Lauri Karvonen and Jan Sunderberg, *Social Democracy in Transition* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1991), 33.

golden years. Toward the end of the 1970s, however, the *gecekondus'* support for the social democrats disappeared and with them the core of the social democratic support. Consequently, the electorate, dismayed by the poor performance of the Republicans, was left with no sensible reason for giving political support to the RPP. In a way, this was inescapable because despite strong attempts to reunite with the electorate, the RPP could not change its traditional character. It remained as an electoral machine. At the parliamentary and administrative level, it was completely dominated by civil servants, lawyers, and economists, in short, by layers of the upwardly mobile professions out of touch with or without any roots in the real life of the working class.

The turbulent 1970s had an untamed effect also within the echelons of the RPP. The ideological development and political realignment within the RPP were, at least in the early days, paralleled by a pragmatic and conciliatory attitude in restructuring the party organization and rearranging the balance of power among the Republicans. In an attempt to remedy the shortcoming, caused by preserving the cult of leadership and, thus, lack of intra-party democracy, the Republicans underwent a series of reformist changes in party administration and statute. However, personalistic politics rendered the overall benefits of good-willed reforms futile. Consequently, Ecevit's charisma and power within the party and the maintenance of a centralized and often authoritarian party structure were hoped to curb the

growing intra-party disputes. Oligarchical and centralizing tendencies had dominated the evolution of the RPP's organizational structure. The crux was whether the Republicans themselves could forget the party's past. Unfortunately, they could not prevent themselves from being besieged by historical bigotry. As Karpat once pointed out, within the RPP, "the initiative for action [was] normally expected from the top party hierarchy and therefore the spirit of obedience and the cult of leadership [was] preserved."¹⁷¹ Any attempt to foster intra-party democracy fell in despair because it was regarded as a sign of disloyalty *vis-a-vis* the leader. Furthermore, Ecevit's personality and tendency to impose his interpretation of the party's policies and establish a centralized authoritarian administration created deep divisions within the party. Moreover, the RPP could not let go of its unfortunate character of inherent contradictions in a language of self-destructive dichotomies, and the immature compartmentalization of the intra-party opposition.

The sociopolitical turbulence of the decade came to an end with the military coup of 1980. Nevertheless, the turbulence within the RPP, which is yet to be resolved today, could never be subsided because it was banned from politics in an unexpected and unfortunate manner on 15 October 1981.

¹⁷¹ Karpat, *Politics*, 407.

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APPENDIX A

Votes and Seats won in Parliamentary Elections, 1950-1977 (in percentages)

| Election Year | Turn Out | Dem. | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------|------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|
| | | DP / JP | RPP | NP | FP | NTP | TLP | NAP | TLP | RRP | Party | NSP |
| 1950.0 | 89.3 | 53.3 | 39.8 | 3.0 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | 83.3 | 14.2 | 0.2 | | | | | | | | |
| 1954.0 | 86.6 | 56.6 | 34.8 | 4.8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | 91.6 | 5.6 | 0.9 | | | | | | | | |
| 1957.0 | 76.6 | 47.3 | 40.6 | 7.0 | 3.8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | 69.6 | 28.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 | | | | | | | |
| 1961.0 | 81.0 | 34.8 | 36.7 | 14.0 | - | 13.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | | 35.1 | 38.4 | 12.0 | | 14.2 | | | | | | |
| 1965.0 | 71.3 | 52.9 | 28.7 | 6.3 | - | 3.7 | 3.0 | 2.2 | - | - | - | - |
| | | 53.3 | 29.8 | 6.9 | | 4.2 | 3.3 | 2.4 | | | | |
| 1969.0 | 64.3 | 46.5 | 27.4 | 3.2 | - | 2.2 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 2.8 | 6.6 | - | - |
| | | 56.9 | 31.8 | 1.3 | | 1.3 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 1.8 | 3.3 | | |
| 1973.0 | 66.8 | 29.8 | 33.3 | 1.0 | - | - | - | 3.4 | 1.1 | 5.3 | 11.9 | 11.8 |
| | | 33.1 | 41.1 | 0.0 | | | | 0.7 | 0.2 | 2.9 | 10.0 | 10.7 |
| 1977.0 | 72.4 | 36.9 | 41.4 | - | - | - | 0.1 | 6.4 | 0.4 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 8.6 |
| | | 42.0 | 47.3 | | | | 0.0 | 3.6 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 5.3 |

Sources: For the elections of 1950 through 1965, see *1950-1965 Milletvekili ve 1961, 1964 Cumhuriyet Senatosu Üye Seçimleri Sonuçları* [The Results of the National Assembly Elections of 1950-1965 and the Senate Elections of 1961 and 1964] (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayını, no. 513, 1966), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; for the 1969 elections, see *12 Ekim 1969 Milletvekili Seçimi Sonuçları* [The Results of the 12 October 1969 National Assembly Elections] (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayını, no. 610, 1970), pp. vi-vii; for the 1973 elections, see *14 Ekim 1973 Milletvekili Seçimi Sonuçları* [The Results of the 14 October 1969 National Assembly Elections] (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayını, no. 702, 1974), 6-7; for the 1977 elections, see *Milletvekili Genel ve Cumhuriyet Senatosu Üyeleri Üçtebir Yenileme Seçim Sonuçları* [The Results of the National Assembly General Elections and the Elections for Renewal of One-Third of the Senate Membership] (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayını, 1977).

Note: The first figure refers to the percentage of votes and the below figure to the percentage of seats. Totals may not add to 100 because of the omission of independents.

Abbreviations: DP-Democrat Party; JP-Justice Party; RPP-Republican People's Party; TLP-Turkish Labor Party; NAP-Nationalist Action Party; TUP-Turkish Unity Party; RRP-Republican Reliance Party; Dem. Party-Democratic Party; NSP-National Salvation Party.

APPENDIX B

Fragmentation in Turkish Party System, 1950-1977; National Assembly Elections (in percentages)

| Elections | Votes won by strongest parties | Seats won by strongest parties | Fragmentation of votes |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1950 | 93.2 | 98.0 | 0.554 |
| 1954 | 91.4 | 97.2 | 0.556 |
| 1957 | 87.9 | 98.3 | 0.605 |
| 1961 | 71.5 | 73.5 | 0.706 |
| 1965 | 81.6 | 83.1 | 0.630 |
| 1969 | 73.9 | 88.7 | 0.697 |
| 1973 | 63.1 | 74.2 | 0.767 |
| 1977 | 78.3 | 89.3 | 0.680 |

Sources: See sources in Appendix A.

Note: Fragmentation of votes is measured by Douglas Rae's (The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967], 56) "index of fractionalization," which is written as follows: $F_c = 1 - (\sum T_i^2)_{i=1}$. In this formula, derived from probability statistics, T_i is equal to any party's decimal share of the vote. Thus in a perfect one-party system, F_c equals zero: the more the vote is dispersed among competing parties, the more F_c approaches, but never reaches, one. Under a perfect two party system (i.e. a 50-50 split), F_c equals 0.5. The model is sensitive to both the number and the relative equality of the party shares.

APPENDIX C

PRE-ELECTION SURVEY, 1977

1. Party Identification by Population Size (in percentages)

| Population Parties | Metropolitan Areas | Cities of 10,000-50,000 Population | Rural Areas |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------|
| JP | 23.6 | 36 | 41.7 |
| RPP | 64.9 | 50.5 | 41.7 |
| Minor Parties | 11.5 | 13.5 | 16.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

2. Party Identification by Occupation (in percentages)

| Occupation Parties | Civil Servants | Farmers | Workers | Small Traders | Housewives | Others* |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|------------------|------------|---------|
| JP | 10.6 | 47.6 | 21.2 | 37.2 | 38.4 | 35.3 |
| RPP | 71.8 | 36.8 | 67.1 | 43.1 | 44.1 | 48.5 |
| Minor Parties | 17.6 | 15.6 | 11.7 | 19.7 | 12.5 | 16.1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 95 | 100 |

*Includes professionals, entrepreneurs, businessmen.

Source: Üstun Ergüder, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Behavior in Turkey" (Paper presented at the Eleventh World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Moscow, Russia, August 12-18, 1979).

APPENDIX D

Electoral results in twenty-nine provinces, 1977 and 1979

| | 1977 | 1979 | Difference |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Registered Voters | 9,499,563 | 8,160,002 | -1,339,561 |
| Number who voted | 6,936,279 | 5,811,276 | -1,125,003 |
| Turnout (percent) | 73.0 | 71.2 | -1.8 |
| Total valid votes | 6,700,92 | 5,666,464 | -1,033,628 |
| | | | |
| Justice Party | 2,467,414 | 2,710,795 | 243,381 |
| Votes (percent) | 36.8 | 47.8 | 11.000 |
| | | | |
| Republican People's Party | 2,722,454 | 1,655,542 | -1,066,912 |
| Votes (percent) | 40.6 | 29.2 | -11.400 |
| | | | |
| Democratic Party | 122,085 | N/A | 122,085 |
| Votes (percent) | 1.8 | - | N/A |
| | | | |
| National Salvation Party | 595,444 | 534,083 | -61,361 |
| Votes (percent) | 8.9 | 9.4 | 0.5 |
| | | | |
| National Action Party | 354,428 | 364,668 | 10,240 |
| Votes (percent) | 5.3 | 6.4 | 1.1 |
| | | | |
| Extreme Left* | 40,122 | 203,339 | 163,217 |
| Votes (percent) | 0.6 | 3.6 | 3.0 |

Source: Resmi Gazete [Official Gazette], no.16803, (Ankara:Prime Ministry, November 8, 1979)

Note: The 1977 figures are for the 29 provinces where partial elections were held in 1979. They do not agree, therefore, with the general results of the 1977 elections. Percentages may not add to 100 because of the omission of the independents.

**Total of Turkish Unity Party and Turkish Labor Party in 1977; total of Turkish Unity Party, Turkish Labor Party, Turkish Socialist Labor Party, and Social Democratic Party in 1979.*