
THE COUP OF 27 MAY 1960

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Introduction

The proclamation of the Turkish republic on October 29, 1923 granted the right of self-government to the nation which was subsequently represented by the Republican People's Party until 1950. The Republican People's Party (CHP) was established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk shortly before the proclamation of the republic so as to initiate the political party process. The party, which played a key role in shaping the concept of the nation-state and which led the drive for social reforms, governed the country for the next 27 years without interruption. There were two attempts to change to a multi-party system during Atatürk's rule. However, these attempts did not succeed due to a number of factors including the nation having insufficient political experience and threats to the new regime (Emiroğlu, 2011:14; Bakan and Özdemir, 2013:373).

Political life in the Republic of Turkey began in 1923 with a one party system and this continued until the end of World War II under the rule of the Republican People's Party represented by managing elites. The system on a new meaning when the Democrat Party (DP) came to power in the wake of the 1950 elections, as this marked the beginning of a multi-party regime after which the nation witnessed the establishment of different parties. However, this era of a multi-party regime should not be taken as representing political pluralism given the fact that the Democrat Party ruled for ten years from 1950-1960 and afterwards the Justice Party (AP) won the elections in 1965 as the DP's successor and stayed in power on and off until 1980 (Özdemir, 2002:227).

Ending the 27-year one-party regime as the winner of the 1950 elections, the Democrat Party, which introduced the concept of an opposition to Turkish political life, positioned itself as a leading center-right party. When the relations between the CHP and DP between 1946 and 1960 are considered, it can be seen that this era showed the first signs of problems arising between the ruling and opposition parties, as well as a period during which common opposition mistakes were highlighted. Moreover, the flawed policies which were pursued during this era by both the ruling and the opposition parties also paved the way for the 1960 Turkish coup d'état, which turned the political balance on its head, set aside the nation's democratic development and played a role in the establishment of the acceptance of military coups (Bakan and Özdemir, 2013:374).

The 1960 coup d'état not only overthrew a government, established by a vote by the public, by force of arms, but also served as a notorious example for the future as the first military coup in the republican era. It tragically interrupted the establishment and

maintenance of democracy in Turkey, completely changing the fundamentals of the political structure (Dursun, 2001:11).

Some of the right- and left-wing parties other than the CHP and DP (and AP) were defined as radicals due to both their plans and their activities. As these parties were forced to fight for legitimacy during the multi-party period they could not pursue a healthy development, or alternatively they took part in deepening the regime crisis together with other powers. The military, on the other hand, made its appearance with the 1960 coup d'état as the most significant power within this political arena. Soldiers were also intensely involved in the political world in the ensuing period (Özdemir, 2002:227).

The Process Leading to the Military Coup

With the outbreak of World War II, the chaotic atmosphere created by the wartime economy produced a commercial and agricultural bourgeoisie. This group grew rich quickly by taking advantage of the war. The harshness of the wartime economy, on the other hand, was felt by working class people and fixed income social groups. Working class people were forced into living under difficult conditions due to increasing taxes and the struggling economy. In addition, an expanded black market and profiteering activities gave the CHP government a particularly difficult time, leading the government to develop a strong attitude towards such groups (Özçelik, 2010:166).

Between 1940 and 1945, three key laws were enacted that were expected to radically change the nation's economic and social structure or to at least make a significant impact. These laws were the National Security Law, the Wealth Tax Law and the Law on Land Provision for Farmers. These three laws would later shape the attempts to become more democratic. The first of these laws, the National Security Law, was passed in January 18, 1940 but was subsequently abolished in 1960. This law was not able to prevent black market and profiteering activities despite arguments to the contrary, and again working class and village people were overwhelmed by drudgery born by the brunt of its failure. The Wealth Tax Law passed in 1942 was an unfortunate piece of legislation in terms of its outcomes both due to its structure and the arbitrary treatments it imposed. The Law on Land Provision for Farmers, on the other hand, was discussed over a long period of time and was criticized by many parliamentarians, including Adnan Menderes in particular, most of whom were wealthy and land-rich. This and many similar wrong practices hurt the CHP government deeply and gave rise to the emergence of an opposition party (Çavdar, 2013:424-440).

1945 was a year when opposition voices were raised against the CHP. Among the strongest opposition voices were Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes, Fuat Köprülü and Refik Koraltan. The Democrat Party was officially established on January 7, 1946 under the leadership of Celal Bayar. The CHP government responded positively to the formation

of this new party. Underlying this positive attitude was the belief that the Democrat Party would not be able to succeed. However, as the DP rapidly increased in popularity across the country and received support from both the public and the opposition, the CHP's friendly attitude changed. So much so that municipal elections previously planned for September 1946 were moved to an earlier time of May and general elections planned for 1947 were re-scheduled to take place in July 1946. This would allow a greater opportunity for the CHP government to stay in power and lower the DP's hopes of coming to power imminently as there would be less time for the DP to organize before elections. The general election on July 21, 1946 resulted in the CHP filling 395 of the 456 seats in the parliament while 64 seats were won by the DP and 6 by independent candidates. As a result the CHP remained in power and the DP had an opportunity to evaluate its influence (Karpat, 2010:232-255).

Electoral corruption, irregularities in vote counts, and the open voting-closed counting procedure by the CHP during the 1946 elections caused raised eyebrows for a long time. Prior to the general election on May 14, 1950, the election law was changed to switch to closed voting and open counting. The election resulted in the DP gaining 53.3% of the vote while the CHP gained only 39.9% of the vote. The DP had 408 parliamentarians and the CHP had 69 (Uyar, 2012:91).

As a result, the 1950 elections marked the moment when the Democrat Party came to power alone with a wide margin. The DP also managed to come to power as the only ruling party in the 1954 and 1957 elections, and remained in power until the 1960 coup d'état. Tensions were raised in the CHP when the DP finished the electoral race far ahead of the CHP, and this tension was reflected in various agencies (Emiroğlu, 2011:14).

Indeed, Adnan Menderes burned all his bridges, so to speak, with the CHP in a speech he gave on June 13, 1950 immediately after the elections and this speech deepened the gap between the two parties in parliament. As Şevket Süreyya Aydemir mentions in his book *Menderes'in Dramı* (Tragedy of Menderes), according to Menderes, the CHP leadership (İnönü) had enticed the military to prepare for a coup, in other words, an insurrection against the government. What led Menderes to make such a speech was that an anonymous colonel had once come to him and told him that some commanders around İsmet İnönü were preparing for a coup against the government. Menderes who believed the colonel made that harsh statement as a result. The new government which immediately took this information seriously were no longer willing to work with the CHP's leader, İnönü, or his close circle. Those who supported Menderes in this speech at the Grand National Assembly made a huge mistake at the beginning of the 1950-1960 period- a mistake for which they would later pay a heavy price (Aydemir, 1993:194).

The DP government made a rapid start in its tenure and, in fact, some called the years

between 1950 and 1954 the golden years of the DP. However, problems appeared in many areas especially at the start of the Democrat Party's second term. Laws were enacted one after another to suppress the press and the opposition. Criticism by the opposition press became harsher and a large number of journalists were given prison sentences (Gülmez and Aşık, 2014:74).

The DP's economic policy worsened the living standards of military officers and fixed income people, and civil servants in particular. On the other hand, the rise of tradespeople earning large incomes obtained in this way resulted in military and civil bureaucratic groups, who had to part company with the government in the wake of the 1950 elections, taking sides against the ruling party. Adding to this atmosphere were the attempts by the DP to silence the opposition and the press by force and all of these eventually led to backlashes between security forces and students during April and May of 1960 which at times resulted in conflicts between them. In the end, on May 27, 1960, a group of young military officers who called themselves the National Unity Committee seized control of the government on behalf of the military (Özdemir, 2002:229).

As economic issues and unrest escalated in the country the DP government adopted an even harsher attitude. In parallel with these political and social crises and polarizations, the university and government conflict had also gradually increased after 1956. The establishment of an Investigation Commission by the DP in the parliament became the final straw. This commission, made up of 15 people vested with broad authority, was assigned to investigate the activities of the press and the CHP. Establishing this commission in the parliament and giving İnönü a suspension for 12 parliamentary sessions during discussions on the approval of the authorization Act made the atmosphere even more tense. During this process which rapidly led to the military coup, universities also made a move against the government. To this end, it is clear that student activities played an important role in the process leading to the 1960 coup d'état (Temizgüney, 2018:186).

Relations between the opposition and the ruling parties took on a different dimension particularly after the 1957 elections. The DP government's downfall began in 1958 when the CHP leader, İnönü, joined forces with other parties by pursuing harsh opposition policies towards the DP. In the meantime, the opposing parties began to look for new allies. The first of these efforts resulted in the formation of the Republican Peasant National Party (CKMP) when the Republican National Party (CMP) and the Turkish Peasant Party (TKP) joined forces. Immediately afterwards, the Liberty Party (HP) banded together with the CHP (Gülmez and Aşık, 2014:74; Temizgüney, 2018:186).

Although there are many other reasons underlying the 1960 coup d'état, a great deal of dissatisfaction also developed over time and eventually erupted at the time of the coup. There were specific issues that had bothered members of the military during the 10-year

rule of the Democrat Party. The first concern was about Atatürk's legacy. The military was of the view that reactionism was favored during the time of the DP government and that this represented a move away from Atatürk's revolutions and reforms. In addition, the harsh criticism of İsmet İnönü, one of the prominent names in the Turkish War of Independence and a founding member behind the proclamation of the republic, also triggered unrest among soldiers. On the other hand, intense waves of migration to the cities due to economic and social changes by the DP government brought with them a new middle class. This caused soldiers who were once members of an elite class in the one-party era to lose their position of leadership and to develop a tenuous attitude towards the government (ed. Ekinçi and Bilgi, 2017:145).

The Day of the Coup

On May 27, a group of young military officers who called themselves the National Unity Committee seized control of the government on behalf of the military. This incident, which received the support of a wide, if not very large, circle, came as a reaction to the recent attitudes of the DP and its rulers who had contradicted its own legitimate existence by establishing an investigative commission with judicial power. The group announced their goal to call an election at the earliest opportunity so as to maintain a multi-party regime. The military officers organizing this coup claimed that their actions were not intended for any specific person or group, but it was clear that they were targeting the DP government (Özdemir, 2002:229-230).

Preparations for the coup had begun a long time before; juntas had been established within the military in the 1950s. Some of these juntas, particularly those led by Cemal Madanoğlu and Talât Aydemir, were highly influential for their serious preparations and impacts on other military posts. Certain incidents in April and May of 1960 had the effect of giving the coup supporters the opportunity to take action. In early April, the CHP leader, İnönü, was forced to wait at the Himmethede station for a long time on his way to Kayseri, he was subsequently prevented from entering the city, and was also attacked in İncesu. In addition, the establishment of an investigative commission, the members of which were all DP parliamentarians vested with judicial power, was considered as a step towards the establishment of an oppressive regime. As the tension built, Cemal Madanoğlu, then-Major General and Land Forces Logistics President, who had previously convinced Cemal Gürsel, then-Force Commander and General, to take over the leadership, gathered his group on the night of May 26, 1960 in the General Command Building for Military History which served as their operations center and military quarters. As their first action, they cut the phone lines to important people and directorates. In the early hours of May 27, 1960, the Turkish Military Academy students and commandos initiated the coup by occupying critical points in Ankara and, towards morning, troops soon pronounced their dominance over the city (Aydın and Taşkın,

2014:61,62).

Groups which were originally in perfect solidarity with the coup against the DP government, fell foul of the military when it came to decide on the method to follow for state governance in the wake of the coup. More precisely, although only for a short time, two different organizations within the military came face to face following the coup when there was a confrontation about who would have a say in the state governance. On the one side, there was the National Unity Committee made up the military officers who had staged the coup but who lacked any homogeneous ideology. The committee discharged some of its members within the first year following the coup due to ideological conflicts. The committee planned revisions to army personnel and universities and began to work towards the establishment of a new constitution and was calling for an election at the earliest opportunity to hand over governance to a civil authority. The second organization was the Armed Forces Association (SKB) which could be called a rival to the National Unity Committee (MBK) and which had formed an extensive structure within the army and had given its first strong message particularly through the Yassıada Trials. Colonels in the Association who argued that politics should be put aside until order could be restored in light of the founding principles of the republic staged two further failed coup attempts under the leadership of Talat Aydemir between 1962 and 1963 (Börklüoğlu, 2017:14; Çakır, 2004:76; Burak, 2011:53).

On the morning of the coup, Cemal Gürsel who came from İzmir was announced as the leader of the MBK. Afterwards, on the orders of Gürsel, a group of professors under the leadership of Istanbul University Rector, Sıddık Sami Onar, was assigned to prepare a new constitution on behalf of the MBK and, at the same time, all political party activities were prohibited. It was also declared that anyone violating the orders would be punished in the most severe way. First of all, 38 people were chosen to be members of the MBK. Then all the DP members of parliament were arrested in line with the report prepared by the Constitutional Commission established under the leadership of Professor Onar. It was on June 12 that the Temporary Constitution defining the powers of the MBK was made public by the Constitutional Commission. Accordingly, a direct legislative authority was proposed and executive power would be exercised through the council of ministers to be assigned by the head of the state and approved by the MBK. The MBK would exercise the sovereign right on behalf of the nation until the Grand National Assembly could assume governance in the general elections. Although the MBK had the power to dismiss ministers, the ministers could only be assigned by the head of the state. While judicial power was to remain independent, the approval or rejection of capital punishment was under the authority of the MBK (Ahmad,2010:208-211).

The Eminsü Incident

At the time of the coup, Cemal Gürsel was of the opinion that he would hand over governance to a civil authority within a year. However there was one group in the committee that did not support the idea of a civil authority taking over governance and who raised this argument with Gürsel at every opportunity. Gürsel wanted to bring into force new regulations for the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and to discharge some of the soldiers (especially who were part of this group). Accordingly, over 4,000 sergeants and military officers were discharged. In this way Gürsel aimed to put an end to matters that could result in a degradation of the army such as disobedience of an order, bribery, corruption, and embezzlement (İlyas, www.batman.edu.tr).

On August 5, 235 generals and admirals, as well as almost 4,500 young military officers were pensioned off, and many complained that even those older than them were still on duty as they faced a struggle to find jobs. After some time, dismissals also began at universities, and this increased criticism of the MBK. Subsequently military officers who thought they had been given a raw deal began to organize and raised their voices through a union known as EMİNSU (Retired Provost Military Officers). Through this process and as a solution, 2,860 retired military officers were assigned to the Secretariats of Civil Defense established by the MBK, and the generals or military officers who were not, or did not want to be assigned to that post, participated in the political parties established afterwards and took a stand against the MBK and the CHP (Turan, 2002:35-36).

The 147 Dismissals

The greatest number of responses to the DP government's oppressive practices in its final period came from the universities. That is why the 1960 coup d'état was welcomed with joy by universities. The MBK thought it would be better to legitimize the coup and explain it to the public through the universities, and so such activities began in September. Some lecturers did not like this idea. This clash of ideas with the lecturers was disturbing for the MBK. The MBK was worried about the lecturers' power to influence public opinion (Sarı, 2016:62-65; Erbil et al., 1998:114).

In fact, the first thing the MBK did was to ask the universities to prepare a new constitution and new election laws. However, from the very beginning, the MBK's agenda also included new regulations for universities. To this end, through Law No. 114 passed on October 27, 147 lecturers and lecture assistants were dismissed and changes were made to the Universities Law (Turan, 2002:37).

The 1961 Constitution

The constituent assembly passed the new draft constitution with a view to holding a

referendum on it on July 9, 1961. This marked the first referendum of the Republican era. This law ensured that every citizen with voting rights could cast their votes and that all political parties could make propaganda. The main issue that dominated the 1961 Constitution was to put into custody institutions which would block political establishments elected by the public as an obstacle to Turkish democracy. Accordingly, the Grand National Assembly was turned into a two-wing platform by creating a Republican Senate which also included appointed representatives. Moreover, a Constitutional Court made up entirely of appointed people was also established to oversee the laws enacted by the Grand National Assembly to which the 1924 Constitution granted the right to exercise sovereignty on behalf of the nation. In addition an organization to direct and maintain control of the government was created under the title of the National Security Council (Turkish Studies Group, 2010:27).

The new constitution weakened the balancing elements that ensure the principle of the separation of powers. The Constitutional Courts, as well as the Radio and Television Council, - although a state institution, also had an autonomous side - and the press gained the right to stand up to and even annul governmental laws. Universities gained autonomous status and the police were prevented from entering a university without the permission of the rector. The 1961 Constitution also included rights to establish an association, gather for a rally or stage a protest march; rights for employees to establish trade unions, to become members of such unions or leave them without prior permission; and rights to enter into collective bargaining agreements or to go on strike (Emiroğlu, 2016:6).

The Yassıada Trials

The very first of the MBK's actions was to arrest DP parliamentarians starting with the party's overthrown leaders, as well as high-ranking soldiers who had formed a close relationship with the DP, and those civilians engaged in corruption, and they were then judged in a special court they organized in Yassıada under the title, the High Court of Justice. The court commissioned by the military committee comprised a president, eight full and six associate members, an attorney general and five deputy prosecuting attorneys. This special court inflicted deep wounds both in the laws affecting the military regime and in the public conscience due to its rulings of lengthy terms of imprisonment and capital punishment. The Yassıada trials continued for a total of 11 months. The court sentenced the following people to death: Adnan Menderes (former prime minister), Celal Bayar (former president), Refik Koraltan (former president of the assembly), Fatin Rüştü Zorlu (former foreign affairs minister), Hasan Polatkan (former finance minister), Emin Kalafat, Ağâh Erozan, Ahmet Hamdi Sancar, Nusret Kirişçiöğlü, Zeki Erataman, Bahadır Dülger, Baha Akşit, İbrahim Kirazoğlü, Osman Kavrakoğlü, Rüştü Erdelhun (former chief of general staff). However, the MBK only approved the death sentences

for Adnan Menderes (1899-1961), Fatin Rüştü Zorlu (1910-1961) and Hasan Polatkan (1915-1961) (Akıncı, 2014:63, Özdemir, 2002:233-234).

The Yassıada trials adjudged a total of 592 defendants in 19 different cases. Among them Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Hasan Polatkan were executed on September 16, 1961 and Adnan Menderes one day later on September 17, 1961 in İmralı. 281 of the defendants were found to be accessories during the fact (a person who helped with a crime), were accused of treason and were asked to be sentenced in accordance with Paragraph 3, Article 146 of the Turkish Criminal Law. Eight defendants were acquitted in the Constitutional case. Six defendants died in Yassıada while their trial in the Constitutional case was pending. Five other defendants also died during and before the trials by suicide or due to other causes (Naskali, www.adfed.org.tr); *Temizgüney*, 2018:205).

In the High Court of Justice, the Democrat Party members were tried together for violating the Constitution in a case with a particular focus on the following issues: amending the Assembly bylaws; confiscating CHP's assets; violating the legal guarantee of judges and the independence of the courts; making the city of Kırşehir a district; making anti-democratic changes to the Election Law; preventing the broadcasting of Assembly sessions; and establishing the Investigation Commission. Among other lawsuits where DP defendants were tried were the Dog Case; the September Events Case; the Baby Case; the Vinileks Case; the Embezzlement Case; the Land Case; the Ali İpar Case; the Mill Case; the Barbara Case; the Covert Appropriation Case; the Radio Case; the Topkapı Events Case; the Çanakkale and Geyikli Events Case; the Kayseri Events Case; the *Demokrat İzmir Newspaper* Case; the University Events Case; the Expropriation Case; the National Front Case and the Constitutional Violation Case (Emiroğlu, 2011:22-23).

Shortly after the executions, despite extensive pressure, people showed their reaction to what happened by casting their votes in the election. Running for the elections of October 15, 1961 were four parties, namely, the CHP, the Republican Peasant National Party (CKMP), the Justice Party (AP) which was established as successor to the DP, and the New Turkey Party (YTP). In the elections with a voter turnout rate of 81%, the CHP received 36.7% of the vote and came first with 173 seats in the parliament while the AP received 34.8% of the vote with 158 parliamentarians, the CKMP won 14% of the vote with 54 parliamentarians, and the YTP 13.7% of the vote with 65 parliamentarians. Despite coming first, CHP could not achieve an absolute majority (Dursun, 2014:385).

The army did not want to hand over governance to the civil authority under the existing conditions. Ten generals and 28 colonels, among whom were the 1st Army Commander and the Martial Law Commander, signed the "21 October Protocol". This protocol included various threats ranging from the cancellation of the elections to the prohibition of political parties and the abolition of the MBK. This decision to intervene was

understood to be put into effect before the opening of the assembly (Demir, 2006:158). Following this development, Cemal Gürsel invited the representatives of the parties to Çankaya where he forced them to sign the “Çankaya Protocol”. According to this protocol, the military officers pensioned off by the MBK would not be re-commissioned, those convicted in Yassıada would not be pardoned, Gürsel would be elected as the President of the Republic and İnönü would be the Prime Minister. In this way the MBK was violating the very Constitution it had prepared and was suppressing other political parties (Akıncı, 2014:64-65). In the elections of October 10, 1965, the AP was voted in well beyond expectations (52.87%) and filled 240 seats in the parliament. As for the 1969 elections, the AP received 46.5% of the vote with 256 seats in the parliament while the CHP lost its base and received only 28.75% of the vote with 143 parliamentarians (Yalçın et al., 2006:587).

Conclusion

Democracy, chosen by the New Republican State as the best governance method within this political structure and its efforts to implement it, were interrupted by the army when it seized control of the government on May 27, 1960, March 12, 1971, and September 12, 1980, and this wounded democracy that has proven to be difficult to heal even to this day.

Established on January 7, 1946, the DP became the first strong opposition party that managed to oppose the CHP. The DP maintained its power in the elections of 1950, 1954 and 1957 as the ruling party, however, it was overthrown by a military coup on May 27, 1960. After their downfall, its members were first taken to the Military Academy where they underwent investigation and were then transferred to Yassıada. The defendants were tried over the period of a year before the Military Coup Court in Yassıada, and on September 15, 1961 the court sentenced many either to life imprisonment or death.

Military coups have dragged Turkey from one chaotic situation to another. Although these coups have been shaped around the claim that democracy was being obstructed by political parties, it is not possible to talk about democracy or lawfulness in the paths they pursued. They merely prolonged the distance Turkey has to cover on its path to democracy and modernization.

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