

YOUTH AND POLITICS IN TURKEY
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- TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND POLITICS**
- THE SCOPE OF THE PAPER
 - STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS
 - LEGAL ASPECTS
 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTIES AND STUDENTS
 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS AND STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS
 - THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS DURING THE PERIOD OF 1946 — 1964
 - CONCLUSION

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TURKISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND POLITICS

The revolutionary student is of course a familiar 19th Century figure - The polytechnicians unfurling a tricolor on the tower of

Notre Dame on July 1830, the assassins of princes and presidents, the Rudins who were prepared to meet anonymous deaths on barricades. It is the large crowds marching from their universities to the principal public buildings that are a new phenomenon. Partly no doubt the explanation is simply that the student population of the world is much greater to day than it ever has been, and that is by nature radical (1), impatient and close to the intellectual sources which provide the reasoned arguments for protest.

Before the last war student demonstrations were most common in colonial or semi-colonial countries such as India or Egypt. Today in Turkey, in Korea and in Vietnam as well as in the other countries, students are having a profound effect on contemporary political affairs. The University students especially in the underdeveloped countries show a keen interest into politics, in the major social, and economic issues of our time.

This observation is exact also for industrial societies, in the U. S. A., for instance, recently the students have received nation wide attention for the stand that an important number of students have taken on capital punishment, the House Un-American Activities Committee, Compulsory R. O. T. C., and peace. The beat student has been followed by a politically mature, serious student who is learning how to be politically effective (as an example at the San Fransisco City Hall, on May, 13, 1960, the Berkeley University students have demonstrated against the Committee of Un-American Activities).

- (1) A survey made among the students of the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Ankara shows clearly this. The students asked to what extent the government answer to the needs of citizens, replied with % 54 majority that government is not efficient to meet the needs of the citizens.

Elder administrators responded differently. They are satisfied with the achievement of government.

Question : To what extent does government answer to the needs of the citizens

<i>Administrators</i>		<i>Students</i>	
Completely	% 6		% 3
Fairly good	% 47		% 34
Insuffuciently	% 41		% 54
Undecided	% 6		% 9
	%100		%100

A. T. MATTHEWS : The Emergent Turkish Administrators, Ankara, 1955, P. 46

It is no mistake to say that the «silent generation» is passing away everywhere.

THE SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

The scope of this paper is limited. Our purpose is to show the main political currents which are now prevailing among the Turkish university students (the political activities of high - school students are excluded). We tried to indicate the development of political behavior of the Turkish university students covering the years from 1946 to 1964. We chose purposely the year of 1946 as a starting point. The students of Turkish affairs know that at that date Turkey entered the democratic arena, with the elections and multy party system.

In this paper we want to give answers to those questions: As a whole what is the stand taken by Turkish university students vis - à - vis important topics such as: the fanatical religious movements, the communist activities (the C. P. is banned in Turkey under the penalty of law). The academic freedom, the approach to the democratic system and public liberties - and finally, the outlook of youth conserning international issues, stating this issue in an other way: Is there any antiwestern feeling among Turkish university students and, if so to what extent?

We would like to point out that we are mainly focused on the activities of the student associations. However we paid attention also to the political activites of students as individuals, being or not being a member of the political parties. Before entering the subject we think it would be appropriate to give some explanation about the actual organization of students associations in Turkey.

STUDENTS ORGANIZATIONS

In Turkey today are 7 universities enrolling about 35.000 students. Those students are represented by two powerful federations: Turkish National Student Federation and Turkish National Union of Student: each of them are composed by the several student associations.

LEGAL ASPECT

The law stipulate that: student associations can not be involved in politics (Article 13. of the Law Concerning Associations).

Their statute also state explicitly: «The association is not interested into politics» (Article 5 of the Statute of M. T. T. F.).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTIES AND STUDENTS

Thus the student associations are forbidden from politics. However the students as individuals can play a political role in Turkey. First of all the students whose age are over 21 have the right to vote in the elections («Law Concerning the Basic Principles of Elections and Registers», Article, 6). They can back any political party they chose, they can help electoral campaign. The students can also be member of political parties in terms of the statutes of parties. R. P. P.'s statute (Article 3) stipulates that «Every citizen male or woman can join the party provided his or her age is the legal age, (in other terms over 21). A. P.'s' statute also (in article 3/a) laying the same principle. Two major parties R. P. P. and A. P. have the youth organizations as an auxiliary branch, according to their statute (Article 36 and article 80 of each parties, statute, respectively).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS AND STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

The relationship between the government and student associations is an interesting one. Generally speaking we can qualify this relationship as a system of patronage. In the past the governments's stand over the politization of the students bodies oscillated from toleration to prosecution, according the government policy in effect at the time. When the student bodies were divided into different groups over the policy to be followed, the government helped the group which backed the government policy and took legal pursuits againts the opposing members of students' bodies. In some instances local authorities intervned in the meetings of sutends associations, dissolved the Cogress of student bodies. In this matter the policy usually was invoking the article 13 of the Law Concercerning the Associations, which forbade all political activities to the students associations. Sometime officials disperseed the meetings according to the «Law Concerning the Public Gatherings and Demonstrations» (this law found as anticonstitutional was changed after the Revolution of May 27, 1960). Today the students associations seem to be enjoying more freedom compared with the era before 1960. To finish this chapter we must add that

financial aid furnished by the government to the student associations under the name of grant or «contribution» was used than and now as a means to exercise pressure over the students associations.

THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS DURING THE 1946 — 1964 ERA

A. THE REACTION OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS ABOUT THE FANATICAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

I — MARSHALL ÇAKMAK'S FUNERAL INCIDENT :

In April 1950, Marshall Fevzi Çakmak died. He was a national hero and a close friend of Kemal ATATÜRK. He served many years as the chief of the Turkish General staff of the army. Later he retired and took the leadership of an opposition party (called Millet Partisi: Nation Party). In the funeral procession the opposition took the advantage to demonstrate against the government. Some university students swelled up by the large crowds of people expressed an antigovernment feeling during the rites. They defied the principles of Atatürk's reforms.

Next day student organizations with a declaration published by all newspapers condemned such manifestations and declared to be loyal to the revolutionary postulates of Atatürk.

II — THE ATTACKS ON THE STATUES OF KEMAL ATATÜRK

The attacks on the statues of Kemal Atatürk during the period covering the years from 1950 — 1953 aroused a great indignation among the intellectuals, as well as among the university students. Atatürk's statues were representing the revolutionary spirit of the modern secular state. The responsables of such crimes were mostly fanatics called TICANI (a religious sect forbidden in Turkey). Under the heavy pressure of the intelligentsia and the student bodies in 1951, the government of Democratic Part, then in power, had to pass a law from the Grand National Assembly penalizing heavily such acts (the Law Pertaining to the crimes against Atatürk). In many instances students associations protested against such attacks.

III — BÜYÜK DOĞU (THE GREAT EAST) INCIDENT :

In 1954 a weekly named Büyük Doğu (The Great East) was sharply criticizing Atatürk's reforms even calling him as a «False

Hero». The student associations reacted against the publications of this weekly. However the Governor of Istanbul did not give permission to a meeting organized by the student bodies. The reason given for the ban was «the preserving the public order».

IV — NURCU (ENLIGHTENMENT) MOVEMENT :

During the years of 1954 — 1960 a new religious philosophy gained vigor in Turkey. This new fanatical movement was called NURCULUK (Enlightenment movement). The founder of this movement was Saidi Nursi, a ninety years old fanatic. He pretended to secure the salvation of the people strictly having obeying them to the principles of KORAN, in every matter, including political, social and economic affairs: He condemned the secular state and Atatürk's reforms as the acts of infideles. The purpose of this religious philosophy was to establish a new state based on Islamic rules, in short a theocratical state. The most interesting thing was that a group of the University students were among the followers.

B. THE STAND TAKEN BY THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS ON COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES

I — THE SABAHATTIN ALI INCIDENT :

As we indicated above, the C. P. is banned in Turkey. All communist activities are prosecuted according to the criminal law. In May 1944 a group of nationalist and panturanians students protested the activities of a well known communist writer, Sabahattin Ali. The governor of Ankara dispersed a meeting organized by the students for this purpose.

II — THE DISMISSAL OF SOME PROFESSORS :

On 1947 a communist youth association was created. They were especially active in the Faculty of Language and History of Ankara University. In 1948 their provocations among the youth led to a nationalist student uprising ending with the dismissal of some professors.

III — THE NAZIM HIKMET INCIDENT :

Nazım Hikmet was a very well known poet. For years he was been a fierce advocate of communism. Many times arrested he was fi-

nally put in jail. In the year of 1950 a press campaign led by the journalists and intellectuals succeeded to free him from the prison. The government granted a pardon. During the campaign the communist students organized a meeting. There was a mêlée between, nationalist and communist students. Police intervened in and arrested some communist students (ÇİÇEK PALAS INCIDENT). The students associations upon this incident sponsored a meeting and condemned the communists.

C. THE DEFENCE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM : THE FEYZIOGLU INCIDENT

In November 1956 the students for the first time took a position on the matter of academic freedom. The students of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Ankara boycotted the classes upon the suspension of their Dean by the government. Democratic Party government was not satisfied with the opening speech of the dean. FEYZIOGLU in his speech has used a critical language about the attitude of the government concerning the universities. Academic freedom he said was the pillar of the democratic system (the dean later adhered to the opposition party).

D. THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

The politisation of the Turkish students associations was shown clearly in the incident which led to the Revolution of May 1960. The scope of this uprising was broad and students even had given some tolls during the demonstrations.

I — ISTANBUL RIOTS :

On April 28, 1960, in Istanbul the University students numbering around 10.000 have demonstrated against the government of Premier Adnan Menderes (1). The students were fired on by the

(1) Increasingly in recent years Premier Menderes and his Democratic Party had been suppressing all criticism of the regime in and out of the Parliament. Some journalist were arrested and jailed. Mr. Truman in an article on May 6, 1960 has warned Turkey's government against the dangers of this direction. He said «... A nation cannot suppress the press without jeopardizing all freedoms imprisoning journalist especially at a time in history when freedom is on the march and needs truth as an ally is a grave mistake and can only lead to trouble», New York Times, May 6, 1960.

police. The students had shouted slogans praising south Korean students who rebelled against the dictatorial regime of Sygman Rhee.

The opposition Leader, Mr. Ismet İnönü, was expelled from the GNA fortwelve session the day before the demonstrations.

Next day Istanbul University students carrying banners and pictures of Atatürk massed before the governor's office and shouted «Resign Menderes» and «Freedom, Freedom». The demonstrators shouted «murderers» at the police but apparently fraternized with the Army.

We must add some professors took a leading role in the riots.

II — ANKARA RIOTS : BLOODY FRIDAY

On April 29 in Ankara about 4000 students demonstrated against the government, as students and professors milled around the Faculties of Political Sciences and Law, police and troops stormed in the buildings and quelled the riot with riffle butts and gunfire. There were some casualties among the students (1). Government ordered all schools were to be closed for a month.

The following days demonstrations continued both in Istanbul and Ankara. Premier Menderes, in a radio talk, condemned such manifestations and said that these riots were not «a revolution» but an attempt of 3 - 4.000 jobless and idlers (2).

Menderes also accused opposition party leaders in provoking the students (3).

The most interesting point perhaps was that there was some fraternizing between the restive students and the army. Students during the demonstration shouted «Long Live the Army»; troops were not hostile against the students, even they expressed some sympathy over them. The feeling seemed to be that the young man in uniform are «our boys».

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- (1) In both riots government official denied any case of death, but there was a toll of 1.
 - (2) New York Times, May 3, 4, 1960. Menderes accused the opposition party, R. P. P. fomenting revolts in order to come to power without elections.
 - (3) R. P. P. has sharply rejected the government assertion that they had incited the students to demonstrate. Times, May 10, 1960.

This was the crucial point. As Trotsky has remarked earlier this century, in «the critical hour» Army and students lined up together (1). As we know in many recent cases where a gesture of political protest has to lead to violence the students have looked in the first place to the army for allies. This happened in Korea, in Vietnam (This is a strange reverse of the 19th century pattern).

The justification for such assumption lies probably in the nature of modern conscripts army where military is a brief break in civilian life.

III — REVOLUTION

On May 27, 1960 War Academy cadets paraded in Ankara in a silent protest procession. Soldiers on duty in the capital made no move to halt them. This was the sign of the coming storm. On May 27, 1960 the Army seized the power in a bloodless, swift and efficient coup. The government was toppled and Military Junta took control all over the country.

M. B. K. (National Union Committee) the ruling military junta pledged elections (1) and all university students who were detained by the old regime were freed.

E. ANTIWESTERN DEMONSTRATIONS (CYPRUS ISSUE)

The Cyprus issue has been a knotty problem for many years. Turkish public opinion has always shown a particular sensitivity over the atrocities that the Turkish Community in Cyprus were exposed for many years. In the riots of 1955 in Istanbul University students took a leading part. Unfortunately some mobs infiltrated by fanatic provocateurs damaged some buildings. Turkish students associations did not approve such odious acts which degenerated the meaning of the protest and gave an erroneous impression to the world.

The Cyprus question after 5 years of latent smouldering burst out again on December 1963. On August 27 and 28, 1964 big anti-

(1) Student, Army, police that is the classic triangle of forces whose interaction decides whether a gesture of political protest, success, is crushed or develops into a revolution.

(1) This promise was kept and the elections were held on October 1961.

western and antiamerican demonstrations took place in Ankara. A hard core of several hundreds demonstrators which later grew up to a huge crowd carried slogans which read «Johnson is a false friend» «You can't buy us with your dollars» «Yankee go home» etc... (2).

These antiwestern and antiamerican demonstrations occurred for the first time in Turkey. One youngster among the crowd expressed his feeling according to the correspondent of TIMES as follows: «We have trusted the west. We have done our utmost to be friends with the west. Now you have let us down. You trample on agreements you have signed and you give Cyprus to Greece» (1). Probably this student was representing the common feeling of the Turkish University students as well as the people.

We can assume that in the future Turkish foreign policy may have some changes. For many years strict boundness to Nato and to U. S. A. was a corner stone of Turkish diplomacy. Now the new generations observe with some disillusionment the price of the unconditional loyalty (2). Turkey is in a critical financial situation with serious shortages; without U. S. A. aid Turkey does not seem to balance her shaky budget. A big portion of this budget is going to the defence expenditures. The forthcoming events will decide to what extent Turkey will change direction; to be sure the students will have some weight over foreign policy issues and an «independent» or a «more dignified national policy» with a national economy policy, if possible, will be worked out. One can assume that the economic revolt will be in wake of political protest of the future generations (3).

F. CONCLUSION :

The author of this paper believes in the value of students' interest in politics. The university students who are the potential administrators and who will assume the great responsibilities in the

(2) The Times, August 29, 1964.

(1) The Times, August 29, 1964.

(2) Premier İnönü expressed his resentment saying «We trusted our allies. Now we are paying for this trust».

(3) It can even be said that there is now a current of feeling among some intellectuals that the government represents an out-date conservatism inappropriate to present day Turkey's needs.

administration of this country should be given a chance to have an acquaintance with politics. However we are inclined to suggest that playing politics had to be out of university campus.

We think that the future of this country will be decided by the courageous student who don't accept the mistakes of their elders and who seek new solutions to the political problems, if left unsolved, in this decade mean the destruction of all life.

We can conclude with the author of «the Student» (1) «The fight the students are putting up is just the preliminary struggle. They are young and growing up in world which for them is also young. For this new world they have ideas and new methods for putting them into practice. They have, in short, a new politics. The fight now is the fight for the freedom to work it out».

A B R E V I A T I O N S

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| A. P. | : Justice Party |
| C. H. P. | : Republican Party of the People |
| G. N. A. | : Grand National Assembly |
| M. B. K. | : National Union Committee |
| M. T. T. B. | : National Union of the Turkish Students |
| T. M. T. F. | : Turkey's National Federation of the Students. |

(1) David HOROWITZ : Student, the political activities of Berkeley students, Balentine Books, New York, 1962. p. 160.