ECONOMICS, SOCIAL CHANGE AND POLITICS IN TURKEY*

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The Government of Adnan Menderes came to a sudden end on May 27, 1960, through a **coup d'etat** engineered by young army officers headed by General Cemal Gürsel. Cabinet members and Democratic Party deputies were arrested and went on trial for violating the constitution and embezzling public funds. The revolt aimed at reinstating the democratic freedoms which had been gradually abolished by the Democratic Party government of Menderes. The establishment of a committee with dictatorial powers in the spring of 1960 to investigate the opposition was considered the Democrats' final drive to assume absolute control. The subsequent protest meetings by students and military cadets, despite martial law, clearly indicated that events in Turkey had reached the point of no return. But Menderes, with his characteristic blindness to happenings beyond immediate view, failed to perceive the outcome and even planned to liquidate the opposition in the army.

The coup was precipitated by the government's use of the army to curb the opposition and repress the students. The army's non-involvement in politics, recently reaffirmed was a basic principle adopted by Atatürk, and rigorousy observed until April 1960 when the army was used to prevent Inönü from entering Kayseri. Ismet Inönü, the head of the opposition Republican Party and a staunch defender of democracy, had sternly warned the government that if it used the army for political purposes it would find its orders disobeyed. Subsequently, several officers resigned in protest and were promptly jailed. General Gürsel, the Chief of the Ground Forces, who opposed the use of troops for political purposes, went into forced retirement, but

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not without warning the officers to stay out of party strife. These were outward signs of inner discontent and accumulating resentment which had been in the making for several years. Yet to most foreign observers, including the Americans, the revolution seemed to have come about suddenly. Many had confidently declared that, the Menderes government had wide support in the country and would therefore weather easily all the protests. When the government was toppled in a matter of hours, even without token resistance, the same observers, like many complacent Turks, found it hard to understand. Even more difficult to understand was the fact that only a few weeks after it came to power, the military junta, especially the younger members, started discussing the urgent need for social reforms such as land distribution, general education, socialized medicine, a thorough secularization and the like. As a matter of fact the talk about social reforms became so intense at one moment that the reestablishment of a multi-party democracy, which was the initial aim with which the military came to power, seemed to fade away. Instead an overall drive for social and economic modernization seemed to have become the junta's goal and many intellectuals from outside applauded the idea. The apologists for social reforms pointed out emphatically that the army had been the main agent of modernization in Turkish history and that it was high time for the military to resume this role by cleansing the society of the greedy materialism brought about by civilian governments manned by political parties. It took weeks of strife within the military junta till the moderate wing prevailed and the extremists were ousted and assigned to overseas posts. All this had been carried out in quiet without any violence and any restrictions on press or public. A strong popular front in favor of democracy made up of intellectuals, press, businessmen and peasants thwarted and discouraged all attempts to establish a strong government while the demands for social progress remained still as strong as ever. Thus the Turkey of 1960 seemed to have evolved to a certain critical point where the strong urge for democracy seemed matched by sufficient pretexts to eliminate it. This situation and ultimately the revolution of May 27, cannot be properly understood without analyzing impact of two major forces which continue to affect the course of Turkish life. First, there is the democratization process undertaken by Turkey herself at the end of the Second World War and second, there is the American military and economic aid. These two forces, one moral the other material, when blended together and applied to Turkey's

special conditions stimulated a process of social change on a scale never encountered before. The American ait amounting to some two billion dollars since the Truman Doctrine in 1947, was extended to Turkey for military and political reasons stemming from policy the contain communism. But when the aid started being used in a myriad of forms it showed its impact on the social structure in a way that neither party had probably anticipated nor expected. The aid came to rest on a suitable ground for change prepared by Turkey herself through a variety of political and cultural reforms brought about long before the American assistance was even in sight. Turkey needed at this juncture in her history massive economic power to fulfill her dreams for economic progress. What the American aid did, quite apart from its original intention, was to provide an answer to the desire for material progress. The aid, supplemented with assistance from other Western countries, even though it increased rather than quenched the thirst for material progress, did provide some clue as to the nature of economic development needed by Turkey and its possible future impact. And since economic development follows the course necessitated by the social forces it resuscitates, we may take a closer look at what happened in Turkey since 1945 and maybe foresee something of the future.

The liberalization of Turkey's regime began in 1945/46 With the decision of the ruling Republican Party to allow the establishment of opposition parties. This decision was brought about by an intricate set of social, economic and political conditions which in the ultimate analysis explain also Menderes' rise to power and his fall.

The Republic was established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) after the overdue downfall of the Ottoman Empire. The economy was ruined, the population illiterate and immersed in fatalism and inertia which had been perpetuated by lack of freedom and imperial traditions of abject obedience and hero worship. Through the Republican Party, Mustafa Kemal embarked on a monumental program of economic development, governmental organization and mass education to create a modern country based on a thinking, self reliant and creative individual. Methods were harsh and results often fell short of the desired gools. Nonetheless, at the end of the second World War, Turkey had established the basis of a national economy. It had now a relatively large intelligentsia brought up in modern schools, and a middle

class with liberal attitudes and enough capital to envisage economic enterprises of its own. There was also a small group of industrial workers and a much larger group of peasants numbering 83 percent of the population.

Social differentiation and stratification, followed by diversification of interests and opinion had taken place in Turkey. Individualistic and progressive concepts placing emphasis on action and resourcefulness undermined the old ideas of monolithic society and absolute government. Demands for changing and adjusting the government to these conditions were heard everywhere in Turkey. The decision to adopt a multi-party system provided some answer to these demands for change, conformed to the long standing democratic ideal of the Republic, and was also a measure likely to please the West with which Turkey had cast her international lot.

The Democratic Party was established in these suitable conditions in 1946, under the leadership of Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes and a few others who had belonged until a few months earlier to the ruling Republican Party. Celal Bayar had been Prime Minister in 1937-38, and was remembered for his statist economic policy as well as for his harsh methods of implementing it. Adnan Menderes, a rich landowner, was a relatively obscure figure until 1945, except in his home province of Aydın where he led the Republican Party organization with some drastic methods. His chance for notoriety came in 1945, during the debates on the Land Reform Bill. Menderes was the spokesman for the Agricultural Committee and, backed by a sizable number of deputies belonging to the landed groups, he opposed the extreme expropriatory provisions of the bill. The intense debate between conservative and liberal minded groups taking place on this occasion cast some light on the dire situation of the peasantry and indicated the need for some urgent measures. Menderes distinguished himself in these debates not only by his brilliance and eloquence, but also by proposing farm credits and modernization as an alternate policy to extensive land expropriation. When Menderes emerged as the founder of the Democratic Party, he found behind him a sizable group of landowners and businessmen, unhappy with the Republican statist policies, who could provide leadership and financial support to political activities. These were soon joined by a conglomerate group of dissatisfied individuals from lower classes ready to follow any leader and any movement

which could criticize the government and propose a change. The **haves** and **have nots** had come together under one magic idea; democracy as a panacea to all evils. But each shout for democracy expressed a different mentality and a different yearning. To the die-hard conservatives and Islamists, democracy meant a return to traditionalism; to the surviving feudal lords in the East, it meant the resumption of domination over peasants; to intellectuals it meant a new step forward toward modernization and emancipation. The Democratic leaders brought together these different groups with conflicting views into one strong organization with the promise that once the Republicans were ousted and democracy established, all grievance would be settled automatically. The Democrats successfully used this organization, at times resorting to questionable methods, to wrest liberal concessions from the government. In doing so, they built public opinion into the chief political force, but failed to grasp its potentialities and foresee its eventual turn against themselves. The political struggle in 1946-50 cast little light on the subtle meanings of democracy, but nevertheless it made everbody aware **of what democracy was not,** namely suppression of freedom, whatever the pretext.

When elections were held in 1950, the Democrats won them by promising liberalization and democracy as the loftiest ideals Which, they very adroitly contrasted with the Republicans' strong-handed methods used during the latter's one-party rule. Obviously, the Republicans' record of achievement had not impressed the voters who wanted democracy and were convinced that a Democratic victory would produce it.

The turn of Turkey toward democracy, her strong stand against communism and her strategic position were sufficient reasons to induce that United States to grant her generous military and economic assistance. The aid started in 1947 in form of military assistance and gradually, especially after 1950, expanded fast into the economic field. This enabled the Democrats, hard pressed to reform the agriculture, to invest heavily in a program of farm mechanization which, supplemented with tax exemptions, created an unprecedented economic boom in the villages. A relative relaxation of state control led to private investment in industry which was further intensified by the government's own program of road and hydro-electric development. When new elections were held, in 1954, the Democrats swept them with a margin greater than in 1950. This victory convinced the Democrats that economic development,

whatever the price and consequence was the cure to all ills. The old promises of consolidating democracy by means of constitutional amendments and special institutions were cast aside, and the government launched into even more grandiose economic plans than before. The pulse of life in the country quickened as employment outlets increased, and as the rural areas were connected to large centers with a good road system and galvanized by economic activity. Adnan Menderes' economic policy, presented to the public with the artifice of a rather captivating personality and well displayed patriotism, secured him a large and faithful following, especially in rural areas. (A few months before the revolution when he visited the town of Tarsus a follower was all prepared, like Abraham in the Old Testament, to sacrifice his own son for Menderes' glory.)

No doubt Turkey under the Democrats had taken a great leap forward. Yet, despite all this material progress, people began to turn away from the Democrats. When elections were held in 1957, the government trailed behind the combined votes of the opposition. Nevertheless, it won a comfortable majority in the Assembly (424 to 186 seats) merely because the vote was split among the opposition parties. The majority system of elections thus favored the Democrats. (The cautious Democrats had passed a law to prevent the opposition from fusing or adopting a single slate of candidates.) But, significantly enough, the Democrats suffered their defeats primarily in the overwhelmingly rural provinces of the East.

Something very basic was wrong, in fact, so wrong that it could not be corrected by superficial measures. Economic development was based on the intensity of capital investment and foreign loans. Industrial plants, instead of dealing with the prime resources and basic needs of the country, tried to answer the immediate and fluctuating demands of the market. The communication system was based on motor vehicles, whereas Turkey neither manufactures such vehicles nor extracts enough oil to run them.

The social effects of unplanned economic development were even worse. The growth of industry swelled the number of industrial workers from about 400,000 in 1950 to over a million in 1960. Wages remained low and living conditions unsatisfactory. Trade unions were formed and demanded labor rights, including the right to strike. The government tried to placate labor by

providing occasional material benefits, lull them with paternalistic advice and when all this proved useless, the trade unions were abruptly suppressed. Extensive discussion of labor problems became taboo, for such discussions were deemed conducive to leftism.

The worst happened in agriculture. The forty thousand tractors (of the type used on U.S. farms) mechanizing the agriculture went into the hands of a small group of upper income farmers who built fortunes fast and spent them lavishly on luxuries and housing. The machine also dislocated the farm tenants and share croppers and forced them to migrate and seek employment in cities. Crowded in unsanitary shack towns, they became a source of friction. The poorer farmers - and Turkey is predominantly a country of small farmers - continued to work their land with old methods. Nevertheless, they had no taxes to pay and were not subjected to emancipation efforts, but free to live their own traditional - and in the eyes of the intelligentsia - backward life. But discontent began to spread among this group as well. People here were no longer satisfied with trifling benefits resulting from tax exemption. They demanded more aid, more welfare, for tales of economic development and fast enrichment had reached them and sharpened their desire for a better life. The villager became even more daring as the government acted as his friend and outdid itself to satisfy his demands. This was strange shift. The government which the villages had feared and obeyed like a divine creature for centuries in the past, now begged them for votes and offered so much benefit in return. This odd deal was called democracy and the emboldened villager was all for it. The demands became so great that only huge assistance could meet them. Short of satisfaction the rural front which supported the Democrats had in fact begun to crack wide open. (Menderes' planned visit to Moscow in July might have been conceived as a means of gaining strength when asking the West for more help or stemmed from a real need for additional aid.) In a way, the creation of this front was a great achievement, for Democrats brought the rich and poor farmers together in a union of interest at the expense of white collar workers and industries which paid taxes and supported the public services. The distress of the white collar worker was further aggravated by inflation and the high cost of living, while rumors of corruption and mismanagement in the ruling party went on unchecked. The city and the village stood separated and then

started to come together in discontent, the first for having paid too much, the second for not getting enough. When promises and threats failed to stop the growing demands and when they served to acerbate criticism the Democratic leaders had nothing to do but let people chose a new government or suppress the opposition - they chose the second alternative and unwittingly sealed their own doom.

The Democratic Party organizational strength was concentrated in small rural towns which supply the villages with farm equipment, serve as their opinion-making centers and control their political life. The small town in Turkey is generally conservative, intensely religious and definitely anti-modernist in cultural matters but very progressive in the adoption of new machinery or other material means. In order to hold them to its side, the Democratic Party adopted extensive religious concessions and increasingly conservative attitudes. The Village Institutes, which trained teachers and produced some of the best writers of Turkey, were gradually deprived of their progressive and practical curriculum and then were transformed into Normal Schools which placed emphasis on theory and instruction. The People's Houses, which had been established in 1931 as cultural centers for the rapid mass emancipation of Turkey, had already been abolished in 1951, supposedly for association with the Republican Party. Anti-intellectualism increased, progressive publications were suppressed, universities were accused of becoming leftist centers and the narrow cultural outlook of the small town became fashionable and piety the greatest human virtue. The educational programs lost momentum; the rate of literacy increased only 5 per cent in the last decade as compared with about 15 per cent in the previous decade (literacy in Turkey is 40 per cent). Meanwhile Menderes boasted in a public speech that each district of a Turkish city had at least fifteen millionaires and that this was a real indication of progress. In remote villages without schools, obscurantism flourished, while science and modernization were attacked at will. It seemed as though cultural regression was deliberately promoted to prevent an intellectual reaction to economic and social changes. The need for electoral support pushed the Democrats to the extreme right and in shifting, they violated the Republic's modernist principles and totally alienated the intellectuals, for both modernism and intellectuals in Turkey are the product of these principles. And intellectuals, whatever their

shortcomings, are the main source of guidance for political movement.

The Turkish Republic rested originally on six principles adopted as the foundation of modernization. The paramount principle, nationalism, expressed the drive for creating a Turkish nation with a genuine native culture purged of all Arabic and Islamic influences. This was primarily a cultural nationalism and was complemented by secularism and populism. The former, conforming to the French philosophy of enlightment, called for the separation of religion and state and preached the deliverance of the mind from the hold of dogmatism and traditionalism. The latter implied the emancipation of all citizens through education. The reforms to implement these principles were enforced by the Republican Party in 1923-45 against considerable opposition from conservatives, many of whom survived the reformist era. With the adoption of the multiparty system and the liberalization it entailed, there arose the question whether the reforms would survive the assault of the old order. In order to forestall the conservatives' reactions, some excessive aspects of the reforms, including the Land Reform, were eliminated. The remainer, it was hoped, would be preserved through the consensus of all political leaders who belonged to the reformist generation. But as the inter-party rivalry intensified the Democrats stealthily promised additional concessions, especially on secularism, in the hope of winning the support of supposedly pious villagers. They confused the semi-pagan, occult beliefs perpetuated by ignorance for millenia, with peasants' true religious beliefs and overlooked the fact that fifteen years of exposure to politics and economic activity might have shattered many of them. In fact it is rather dubious whether such promises secured the Democrats much following, save in areas where life stagnated and archly conservative landlords held tight control. There is enough evidence to believe that generally economic considerations, and not religion any longer, have become instrumental in deciding the villagers' political allegiance. The Democrats' policy completely alienated the intelligentsia and forced them to side with the Republican Party which championed the cause of modernization and reform according to Atatürk's ideas. The political struggle reverted once more to a fight between **old** and **new** and ended ultimately in the victory of the intelligentsia. This was in fact the victory of a new intelligentsia whose influence had been on the rise for the last two decades. These were individuals who

came from the grass roots of Turkish society and represented a new social-democratic spirit closer to the realities of the society. The Republic trained scores of individuals for teaching and professional jobs in the modern schools in exchange for some years of government service. The lower middle classes and peasants thus had a chance to educate their children. The overwhelming majority of Turkey's 35 thousand teachers and an equal number in other professions, including army officers, came from this social group. The economic development and the rise of a class of independent entrepreneurs opened new employment outles in private enterprises and made government jobs and teaching less desirable than in the past. But, for the lower income groups which were hard hit by inflation and high cost of living, the free professional schools remained the main approach to status and better income. In fact, such schools became exclusively populated by them, as the upper income groups moved into big business and politics and were no longer interested in minor professional jobs.

The ideas of decomracy and freedom brought by liberalization found wide acceptance among many of these intellectuals. Democracy for them meant not only equality of status and opportunity, but also a method and a solution for overcoming the social and cultural backwardness of their own social groups. The Republic's ideals of nationalism, sacrifice and abnegation imbuded in them a feeling that it was the intellectual's duty to help his society reach the 20th century standards of life. Had intellectuals been educated in the days of the Empire in aristocratic traditions, they might have struggled to identify themselves with the ruling circles to gain recognition. But in a democratic era their scientific training turned them back to their own people and their own problems. The bases of intellectual thought in Turkey are rooted now in the country's own social and cultural problems and in the human being. It is this humanitarian, liberal and realistic individual who has expressed his yearnings in the present revolution. The Turkish literature of the past fifteen years stands as an eloquent testimony to the scope and depth of contemporary Turkish thought, and it is this literature which had prepared the state of mind leading to action for the restoration of Republican ideals.

The Democratic Party has been dissolved now. But the chain reactions of social and economic forces which it set in motion will continue to affect Turkish life with the effect that lower social groups will become more dynamic and demand a larger share of

material welfare and freedom. The villagers demand credits, agricultural machinery, medical service, schools, and better opportunities for their children. The expanded system of communication, radios, newspapers, inform them of progress in the atomic age and remind them of their own backwardness. City workers demand better wages, freedom of organization and bargaining rights. Intellectuals press for educational measures to generalize the reforms, especially secularism, and erase all mental and material backwardness, claim to freedom of expression and equality of opportunity are general. These are legitimate demands and nobody can ignore them. Whichever political party comes to power it is bound to face and answer these demands.

Economic development and social change have created a series of conflicts which had been pressed into silence by the previous administration, and which will come into the open when life returns to normal.

Strong national solidarity prevails in Turkey. Moreover, the country enjoys the advantage of having no class but merely small groups with entrenched habits and interests which oppose adjustment to a new mode of democratic and modern life. But it lacks the human element capable of defining, planning and supervising this adjustment. Excessive conservatism has prevented the emergence of qualified groups of bold economists and fearless social thinkers. Political parties and intellectuals have discussed vaguely some of the effects of social transformation but avoided dealing with the essence of the problem. The country's life and events go on in the twentieth century, but economic and social thought creeps far behind through the maze of traditionalism, political superstition and patriarchal outlook. This situation leads many intellectuals to the point of frustration and exasperation. Some end by advocating, as witnessed during the months following the revolution, a quick and radical action by the government to end social injustice and provide to all people equal opportunities for cultural and material development. Yet, the overwhelming majority of intellectuals continues to believe in the inherent virtues of democracy for achieving balanced economic development and maintaining political freedom at the same time. Whether such a belief will be maintained when the rate of economic development has slacked off or when the benefits drawn therefrom remain limited to small group is still to be determined. Meanwhile the country tries to get to a normal life by using to

good advantage the experience of the past. Economic problems continue to remain the main item on the agenda. A national planning board has been established to devise a program of development in accordance with the country's needs and own resources. The commissions, planning educational, land and health reforms are active but the extremist approach to reforms has been abandoned in favor of a moderate and realistic policy. The government, although basically avarse to additional indebtedness abroad (Turkey's annual interest on the existing debt amounts to $130,000,000) has been forced to seek new loans to stabilize the economy and cover the trade deficits. It has even issued new currency to meet its expenditure and reopened some construction projects to prevent widespread unemployment. On the political front it continues to support NATO and CENTO despite some vague neutralist tendencies as indicated by the utterances of the ousted leaders who claimed that Turkey's indebtedness abroad deprived her of freedom in foreign affairs. Internally the National Unity Committee which had originally absolute power, has become the upper house of a Constituent Assembly and shares power with a lower house composed of nominated civilians until a popularly elected Assembly is convened. The national elections seem to be definitively scheduled for this year on October 15, 1961, and the ban on political activities is ended. A new constitution, establishing a constitutional court, has been ratified by the people. There is nothing at this point, (after the ousting of the junta's extremist wing which rejected a multi-party democracy), to prevent General Gürsel from returning power to a civilian administration once the proper legal foundation for a stable democracy have been established. Thus the revolution of May 27, while it did not solve many of the outstanding social and economic problems of Turkey did establish at least the foundation on which such solutions may be built. For the West, and for the United States in particular, the success of democracy in Turkey signifies not only the victory of an idea but also of a partnership that may set an example to be followed by other nations in need of development and avid for freedom at the same time.