

THE LAST PHASE IN THE HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS (1923-1924)

That the Turkish national resistance movement, which fought to defend the Turkish national rights (*hukuk-u milliye*) against the claims of the victorious Entente and its Greek and Armenian clients from 1918 onwards, was dominated by former members of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, C.U.P.), is beyond doubt. For its personnel the movement depended heavily on the local branches of the C.U.P. and the Unionist officers in the Army. Ideologically, too, the two movements were closely related, a fact which is recognized more and more¹.

To my mind it is also clear that the growth of the national resistance movement was actively sought and prepared by the old C.U.P. leadership. In this context, Enver's concentration of the best troops in Eastern Anatolia (out of reach of the Entente), the secret depots constructed by the *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa* (Special Organization, Enver's secret service) on his and Talât's orders throughout Anatolia, the continued existence of the *Teşkilât* itself under the name *Umum Âlem-i Islâm İhtilâl Teşkilâtı* (General Revolutionary Organization of the Islamic World) and the founding of the organization *Karakol* (the guard) with its twin purposes of protecting former Unionists and building a nationalist cadre in Anatolia, spring to mind². The plans for such a resistance movement may even have dated from 1915, when the Unionists formulated them out of fear for an Allied breakthrough at the Straits³.

Although we are able to discern the Unionist heritage in many aspects of the national movement, only a very small part of the Unionist activity after 1918 actually took place under the banner of the C.U.P. The C.U.P.

1 Cf. Ali Kazancıgil, "The Ottoman-Turkish State and Kemalism" in Kazancıgil, Ali and Ergun Özbudun, *Atatürk Founder of a Modern State* London, 1981, pp. 37-56.

2 Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor. The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905-1926*, Leiden, 1984, pp. 68-88

3. Zürcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105

was officially dissolved at the party congress of November 1918, but this does not mean that it ceased to exist as an independent organization from that date. In the first place the same congress decided to found a new party (the *Teceddud Fırkası* or Renovation Party), which functioned as the political heir to the C.U.P. until its dissolution by the Liberal government in the summer of 1919. Furthermore, we should not forget that a number of the most prominent leaders of the C.U.P. had already left the country before the congress (Enver, Cemal, Talât, Bahaeddin Şakir, Dr. Nazım) and that a number of C.U.P. leaders who remained behind and who would play a prominent role in the intrigues of 1923-1924, did not support the dissolution (Cavid, *Kara Kemal*)⁴.

In its first phase, the national resistance movement was generally identified with the C.U.P., both among its supporters and among its opponents. But when, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Paşa, it gradually developed into a different organism, there were at least two instances where former Unionists tried to regain control under the banner of the C.U.P. The first time this happened was in 1921, when Enver Paşa tried to return to Anatolia and to take over the leadership of the movement from Mustafa Kemal. Although this episode has been treated extensively elsewhere⁵, a short synopsis is needed here as background to the later episodes.

In 1921 Enver was still highly regarded by many within the national movement and he tried to mobilize this support (and that of the Soviet Union, which was vital for the survival of the movement) by posing as a radical left-wing alternative to Mustafa Kemal. For this purpose he had founded the *İslâm İhtilâl Cemiyetleri İttihadı* (Union of Islamic Revolutionary Societies) in Berlin. This pretended to be a global organization representing the whole Muslim world, but in reality it consisted of a number of expatriate activists from a number of countries, mainly former *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa* agents. Next he had founded a Turkish branch of this organization, the *Halk Şurular Fırkası* (People's Soviets Party). In February 1921, he returned from Berlin to Moscow to await his chance. Inside Anatolia, the situation appeared to be increasingly favourable to his plans. In the spring there was much opposition to the attempts by nationalist leaders to reach a compromise with the Entente at the London conference and when the Greek summer offensive seemed to be successful, Mustafa Kemal's position became very vulnerable. Many clamoured for the return

4. Mahmut Celâl Bayar, *Ben de Yazdım. Millî Mücadele'ye Gidiş*, İstanbul, 1965. vol. 1, p. 121, *Yakın Tarihımız*, İstanbul, 1962-1963, vol.2, p. 237.

5 Paul Dumont, "La fascination du bolchévisme. Enver Pacha et le Parti des Soviets Populaires 1919-1922" in *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 16-2 (1975), pp 141-166.

of Enver as the only man who would be able to retrieve the situation⁶. But Enver hesitated for a considerable period and so gave Mustafa Kemal the opportunity to strengthen his position. He made the national assembly in Ankara more disciplined and reliable by uniting his supporters in the *Müdafaa-i Hukuk Grubu* (Defence of Rights Group) and outside the assembly he reduced Enver's chances by replacing unreliable officers in sensitive posts. Meanwhile, Enver left Moscow on July 30 for Batum, where he met with a number of prominent Unionists (*Küçük Talât Muşkara*, Halil Kut, Dr. Nazım) and was in close contact with the nationalist organization in Trabzon (which supported him) and with supporters in Ankara, some of whom visited him. Between 5 and 8 September 1921, this group held a small congress in Batum, not under the name of the *Halk Şurular Fırkası*, as one might expect, but as the C.U.P. It adopted the political programme of the *Halk Şurular Fırkası* however, which was a radical platform with a mixture of Islamic, socialist and corporatist elements, influenced both by the Soviet experiment and by the attempts at corporatism in Turkey during the First World War⁷.

Politically, the whole show in Batum quickly became irrelevant. Mustafa Kemal had persuaded the national assembly to give him dictatorial powers in the prevailing crisis on August 5, and by September 15, it became clear that the troops under his command had beaten back the Greeks in the battle on the Sakarya. Enver's moment had passed and although he stayed on for two more weeks in Batum, in the end he had to face facts and he left for Central Asia, where he was killed by the Red Army in July 1922.

The next (and, as far is known, also the last) time Unionists assembled under the aegis of the C.U.P., was in the period 1923-1924. The activities of this period certainly were not directly connected to those of Enver and his supporters in 1921. This shows in the fact that the initiative this time rested with a different group of Unionists and in the totally different character of the programme formulated in 1923.

The new activity was concentrated inside the country, in Istanbul, where quite soon after the nationalist victory in the independence struggle a climate of discontent had come to prevail, caused by the extremely bad economic situation in the former capital, a general feeling of neglect on the part of Ankara, and by rumours of the establishment of a republic

6. Bîlâl N. Şımşır, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk (1919-1938)*, Ankara, 1979, vol. 3, p. 579.

7. Mete Tunçay, *Mesaî. Halk Şurular Fırkası Programı. 1920. Ek : Halk Zümresi Siyasî Programı*, Ankara, 1972.

with Ankara as its capital (something which threatened the very existence of tens of thousands in Istanbul). The gradual erosion of the position of the Caliphate, which manifested itself throughout 1923, also caused irritation in Istanbul, where many felt a bond of loyalty with the dynasty.

Two figures led the circle of Unionists which was active in 1923-1924: Mehmed Cavid (1875-1926), the former C.U.P. minister of finance and the financial expert of the Lausanne delegation, a widely respected intelligent and cosmopolitan politician, who had opposed Turkey's entry into the War in 1914, and *Kara* or *Zülûflü* Kemal (?-1926). This lastnamed figure, the real motor behind the Unionist activities of 1923, is one of the most important political figures of his time. His biography would be a very valuable addition to our knowledge of the Young Turk era and the years of the national movement, if the materials for it could be found. Kemal had probably been a member of the first C.U.P., which had been broken up in 1896 and he knew Talât from that time. In early 1907 he had been one of the first to be contacted by Talât when the latter was trying to extend the *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Freedom Society), which formed the basis of the second C.U.P., to Istanbul⁸. In the years that followed, Kemal emerged as the most important party-boss of the Committee in the capital. During the War years he controlled a large part of Turkey's economic life as head of the Special Commercial Commission, the *esnaf* (guilds) and the new corporations he created. For a short time he even held the position of Minister of Supplies⁹. His influence with these professional organizations served him very well, when, together with a few friends, he founded the *Karakol* organization in October 1918¹⁰. The corporations then served as the basis of the nationalist underground network in Istanbul and its surroundings. In May 1919, Kemal was deported to Malta by the British, from where he led a successful escape in September 1921¹¹. After his return he continued to lead his commercial enterprises in Istanbul. In 1926, he was condemned to death in absentia for his alleged role in the Izmir-conspiracy and when the police found his hiding place, he committed suicide¹².

From 1922 onwards a group of Unionists crystallized around the figures of Cavid and Kemal, which was recognized as potentially influential and dangerous by the leadership in Ankara, as is apparent from the

8. Enver Behnan Şapolyo, *Ataturk*, İstanbul, 1943, p. 42. Cf. Zürcher, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

9. Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Millî İktisat" (1908-1918)*, Ankara, 1982, pp. 270-278, 308.

10. Zürcher, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

11. Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Malta Sürünleri*, İstanbul, 1976, pp. 436-439.

12. Kılıç Ali, *İstiklâl Mahkemesi Hatıraları*, İstanbul, 1955, p. 62.

fact that Mustafa Kemal himself sought contact with the group to learn about its intentions in the post-war situation. The first contacts were probably laid by *Topçu İhsan* and *Kılıç Ali*, who were sent to Istanbul by Mustafa Kemal towards the end of 1922¹³ and in January 1923, a meeting between the two Kemals was arranged in Izmit¹⁴.

The meeting took place against the background of a tour of Western Anatolia made by the President to expound his views and to gain the support of important opinion-leaders as a preparation for the measures through which he asserted his power after the Independence War (stages in this process were the amending of the *Hiyanet-i Vataniye kanunu* (High Treason Law) on April 15, the forming of the *Halk Fırkası* (People's Party) as exclusive heir to the resistance movement, the proclamation of the *Dokuz Umde* (Nine Principles), the party manifesto, and the elections of June¹⁵.

Besides *Kara Kemal*, *Yakup Kadri* (Karaosmanoğlu), the representative of the Defence of Rights Association charged with organizing the Istanbul branch, and *Ebuzziya Velid*, who represented *Mim Mim*, the nationalist underground in Istanbul in 1920-1922, were also invited for these conversations¹⁶.

During his conversations with Kemal, Mustafa Kemal asked him about the plans of the C.U.P. after the war. Since the Unionists were dispersed, Kemal could not give an immediate answer, so Mustafa Kemal suggested that he bring together the most prominent Unionists and see how they felt. From the fact that these discussions took place at all, one may conclude that both sides took the existence of the Unionists as an independent body for granted at this time.

As a sequel to these conversations *Kara Kemal* organized a kind of Unionist congress, which met at Cavid's home around the middle of April 1923. We do not know exactly who participated in the discussions, but there seem to have been some fifteen to twenty people present. The names of some of the participants are known : Cavid, Kemal, Dr. Nazım, Dr.

13 Kılıç Ali, *op cit*, p. 28

14 Zürcher, *op cit*, p. 133 Kılıç Ali maintains that it was Kemal who sought contact with Mustafa Kemal, but both the other testimonies we have and the character of the meetings organized during Mustafa Kemal's trip make this unlikely

15 Michael M. Finefrock, *From Sultanate to Republic Mustafa Kemal and the Structure of Turkish Politics 1922-1924*, Princeton, Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, 1976, pp. 191-209

16 In his memoirs, Yakup Kadri tells us that Mustafa Kemal ordered the representatives of the three groups to unite under the banner of the Defence of Rights Association (Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu), *Politikada 45 Yıl*, reprint, Istanbul, 1984, pp. 30-31) Of course, there may have been more than one conversation

Rusuhi, Ahmed Şukru, Huseyin Cahid (Yalçın), *Filibeli* Hilmi, *Yenibahçeli* Nail (the leader of the independent Unionists in Ankara), *Çolak* Selâhaddin (Koseoğlu), Vehbi, Ahmed Nesimi (Sayman) and *Huseyinzade* Ali (Turan) were there, as were probably Rahmî, Ismail Canbolat and *Kuşuk* Talât (Muşkara)¹⁷. A few names one would expect to crop up in this company (*Hafız* Mehmed, *Kara* Vasıf, Halil (Menteşe), Midhat Şukru (Bleda)) are not mentioned in the sources. It is clear that this group did not consist of former supporters of Enver Paşa. He had always leant on the “*mektepli*” officers within the C.U.P. while the group which gathered in Istanbul in 1923 was dominated by the party bosses and politicians, in other words : by the section of the C.U.P. which had always formed Talât’s power base before 1918. *Kara* Kemal had been a close associate of especially Talât.

They met for two days and the discussions centered around the question of the C.U.P.’s future role, its participation in the coming elections and a suitable party manifesto. The statements later made by the participants¹⁸ all seem to indicate that the meeting declined to take part in the elections as a separate opposition party. It accepted Mustafa Kemal’s leadership and offered to support the candidates selected by him in the elections. Some of the witnesses later stated that individual Unionists would try to get elected with Mustafa Kemal’s support, others deny this¹⁹. There can be no doubt, however, that an election programme was discussed, or rather : a nine-point platform, possibly intended as an answer to Mustafa Kemal’s *Dokuz Umde*, published on April 8²⁰.

The manifesto was worlds apart from Enver’s radicalism of 1920-1921. Of course, the C.U.P. had always been very flexible (and divided) ideologically, but the difference between the two programmes of 1921 and 1923 could not have been greater. The latter was a liberal document with a Western European flavour with as most important points : division of powers, direct elections, a two-chamber parliament and Istanbul as capital²¹. There was no trace of the corporatism with which *Kara* Kemal had been associated in the World War and from what we know of the

17 Huseyin Cahid (Yalçın) in *Yakın Tarihimiz*, Istanbul, 1962-1963, vol 2, p 332

18 Statements by Ahmet Şukru, Cavid and Dr Nazım at the trials following the İzmir conspiracy in 1926 are quoted in Erman, *op cit*, and in Feridun Kandemir, *İzmir Suikastının İçyüzü*, Istanbul, 1955. Huseyin Cahid (Yalçın) gives an account of the meeting in 1923 in his *Siyasal Anılar*, Istanbul, 1976, pp 272-274

19 Yalçın, *op cit*, p 274

20 For a complete text of the *Dokuz Umde*, see Tunçay, *Tek Parti Yonetimi*, pp 354-356 and Finefrock, *op cit*, pp 313-316

21 *Yakın Tarihimiz*, vol 2, pp 236-237

ideas of the Unionist leaders, this programme seems to reflect those of Cavid more than of anyone else. The whole rationale of the programme seems to have been to prevent Mustafa Kemal from establishing a military dictatorship in Enver's mould, something these civilian Unionist politicians seem to have been particularly worried about²². They saw Enver and Mustafa Kemal very much as birds of a feather and intensely disliked the idea of a continued military dominance of the political system.

There can be no doubt that the manifesto was intended to be that of a revived C.U.P. In fact, it says so in the first article²³. If we combine this with the fact that the meeting had voted to support Mustafa Kemal and not to found an opposition party, the conclusion is inescapable that it in fact offered the leadership of the C.U.P. to Mustafa Kemal. The Unionists probably overestimated their strength, due partly to the fact that many of them had spent the last few years outside Anatolia and were not in touch with developments there and partly to their perception of the personality and capabilities of Mustafa Kemal. We know that for instance Cavid, Huseyin Cahid and Dr. Nazım did not take Mustafa Kemal very seriously as a politician, even if they acknowledged his military talents²⁴.

The decisions of the congress were submitted to Mustafa Kemal, but when he answered one week later, he refused the offer of cooperation and requested the Unionists to stay out of politics for the moment.

The press in Istanbul meanwhile had picked up rumours about the gathering of Unionists and reported on it, speculating on their intentions. In an official reaction on April 14, Mustafa Kemal denied that any offer from the C.U.P. had reached him, remarking on the fact that, since the C.U.P. had been dissolved in November 1918, no one had the right to speak on its behalf²⁵. In the elections of June, Rahmi, İsmail Canbolat and Ahmet Şukru were elected to the National Assembly, but as candidates of the *Halk Fırkası* (in itself a sign that Mustafa Kemal did not yet want a showdown with the Unionist group).

When the political situation in Turkey grew tense in 1924 because of the signs that a split between the moderates and the radicals in the *Halk Fırkası* was imminent, there were again reports in the Istanbul press

22. Falih Rifkî Atay, *Çankaya. Atatürk'un Doğumundan Olumune Kadar*, İstanbul, 1980, pp. 382-382.

23. *Yakın Tarihümüz*, vol. 2, p. 203.

24. Atay, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

25. Nîmet Arsan, (ed.), *Atatürk'un Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Ankara, 1961, vol. 3, pp. 62-63.

concerning activities by the Unionists. In the beginning of October the papers pointed to the existence of an “*ittihatçılık meselesi*” (problem of Unionism). It was suggested that both within and without the *Halk Fırkası* there were a number of Unionists striving to regain power under the aegis of the C.U.P. There were reports that Unionists held meetings in Kemal’s office in the *Mesadet Hanı* in Sirkeci (Istanbul) and Kemal was again considered the leader of the group. When asked to comment, the Unionists denied that they were politically active and the Chief of the Political Department of the police also denied any knowledge of Unionist intrigues²⁶.

When the definitive split in the *Halk Fırkası* finally occurred and it became clear that the moderates around Huseyin Rauf (Orbay) would be forming an opposition party, around the middle of November, the papers started speculating about possible involvement of the Unionists with the new party (Unionists, that is, who were still primarily identified with the C.U.P. The founders of the new *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* [Progressive Republican Party]²⁷ were without exception former Unionists, too, as were the leaders of the *Halk Fırkası*). According to these newspaper reports the Unionists met (again in Kemal’s office) to discuss whether they would support the new party or revive the C.U.P. The newspapers ascribed the P.R.P. programme both to Kemal and to Cavid and there were speculations that Cavid might stand as a candidate in the by-election in Istanbul in December²⁸. There are reports on the reactions of the P.R.P. leaders too. They deny that either Kemal or Cavid had been involved in the drawing-up of their programme and put the rumours down to the fact that some of them are befriended with Kemal. One remark by an anonymous P.R.P. spokesman is especially interesting, i.e. that to the new party not the programme but the organization of the C.U.P. was important²⁹ !

That the P.R.P. was a cover devised by the Unionist group around *Kara* Kemal, as has been said so often in Turkey since the trials of 1926 (in which this was one of the main theses of the prosecution)³⁰ is unlikely. All the evidence points to the fact that the P.R.P. originated in the circle of former leaders of the Independence Movement, Mustafa Kemal’s

26 *Son Telgraf* of 10.2.1924 ; *Tevhid-ı Efkâr* of 10.3.1924.

27. The author of this article is at the moment preparing a history of this first opposition party of the Turkish Republic.

28. *Son Telgraf* of 11.17.1924.

29. *Son Telgraf* of 11.13.1924

30. Erman, *op cit*, pp 38-46

former colleagues, who felt they were being pushed aside by relative newcomers relying on Mustafa Kemal's support and who were opposed to the authoritarianism of the radical wing around the President. What is clear, however, is that there were close contacts between this group and the Unionists around Kemal. The programme published by the P.R.P. certainly showed a lot of similarity to the nine point manifesto drawn up in 1923. This can be explained partly by the fact that in both cases the underlying aim of the programme was the same : to curb Mustafa Kemal's authority, but it is also true that the programme of the P.R.P. was published directly after the founding of the party, so it may have been prepared earlier. There were many personal links between the two groups too : İsmail Canbolat, who was one of the original "dörtler", the founder members of the P.R.P. in the assembly³¹, was a member of Kemal's circle, as was Ahmet Şükrü who was also known as a protégé of Rauf (Orbay). Rahmi joined the new party and was its candidate in the by-election in Izmir in December. He was also related to Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), the P.R.P. secretary. Kara Vasıf, who had been co-founder of *Karakol* with Kemal in 1918, became the head of the Istanbul branch of the P.R.P.

The Progressive Republican Party has not existed long enough for us to know whether the Unionists intended to use it as a way to regain power and whether they would have succeeded. The *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* (Law on the Maintenance of Order) of March 1925 made all further political opposition in Turkey impossible and the P.R.P. was officially closed down in June. The purges which followed in 1926 eliminated the P.R.P. leaders politically and the independent Unionists both politically and — partly — physically. From Kemal's circle, Kemal himself committed suicide and Şükrü, İsmail Canbolat, Dr. Nazım, Cavid, Nail and Hilmi were executed. Rahmi was condemned to ten years imprisonment, while Hüseyin Cahid had already been convicted during a separate trial in 1925. After 1926, Unionism was a political taboo in Turkey and, as far as is known, no attempt to revive the C.U.P. has ever been made after this date.

E. J. Z.

31. They were : Rauf (Orbay), İsmail Canbolat, Adnan (Adivar) and Refet (Bele). (*Tevhid-i Efkâr* of 10.29.1924).