

**THE OTTOMAN LEGACY OF THE TURKISH  
REPUBLIC: AN ATTEMPT AT A NEW  
PERIODIZATION<sup>1</sup>**

BY

ERIK J. ZÜRCHER

*Nymegen*

*Introduction*

Traditionally, and for obvious reasons, the year 1918 has been looked upon as a crucial dividing line in the history of the modern Middle East.

The political map of the area changed drastically, with the whole area formerly under Ottoman sway being divided into newly independent states (Hejaz) or mandates (Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine and Syria). In the years after the World War age-old institutions like the Sultanate and the Caliphate lost their binding influence and disappeared altogether.

Nowhere was the apparent change more radical than in Turkey, where a national—and nationalist—secular republic succeeded the old multinational empire. Apart from the ephemeral Kingdom of the Hejaz, which was soon swallowed by the growing power of Ibn Sa'ud's Wahhabite warriors from Central Arabia, Turkey was the only independent state to rise from the post-War settlement in the Middle East.

The image of Turkey arising from the ashes like a phoenix, and a fundamentally changed phoenix at that, was both obvious and pervasive. In fact, the titles of the best-known books on modern Turkey, which appeared in the thirties, forties and fifties show just how pervasive: "Turkey Faces West" (Adivar, 1930), "The Tur-

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a series of lectures held at the SUNY Binghamton, University of Louisville, KY, Ohio State University and University of Minnesota in April, 1989.

kish Transformation” (Allen, 1935), “The New Turks” (Bisbee, 1951), “La Nouvelle Turquie” (Georges-Gaulis, 1924), “The Old Turkey and the New” (Luke, 1955), “Kamal Atatürk Untergang und Aufstieg der Türkei” (Melzig, 1937) and—significantly—“Phoenix Ascendant” (Orga, 1958)

The fact that this image was so widely accepted abroad, that is to say in the West, and that this supposedly “new” Turkey was judged so positively, is due in part to the fact that it appealed to a very wide spectrum of Western opinion. To liberal opinion the replacement of the Sultanate and Caliphate by a secular Republic represented a victory for democratic values, while to the left, the Turkish victory in the Independence War represented a success in the anti-colonial struggle. Psychologically, the fact that the Turkish republican government so emphatically rejected its own traditional Islamic civilisation and openly and whole-heartedly chose to imitate the West, even in purely superficial things like the replacement of the traditional headgear, the Fez, with the Western hat, implicitly constituted a gratifying recognition of the superiority of Western culture. By contrast, the Young Turks, who had joined imperial Germany in the War and were held responsible for the fate of the Armenians, had a very bad press at the time.

There is, however, a second reason for the unquestioning acceptance of the Turkish Republic as something entirely new and wonderful: this image has formed the basis of Turkish historiography on the period for over sixty years. To understand why this tradition has gone largely unchallenged for so long, we have to understand how it came into being, and for this we have to look at the political history of Turkey in the nineteen twenties.

In the years up to 1926 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gradually established his hold over the Turkish political scene, pushing aside his competitors, mostly leaders of the independence movement with a Young Turk background. In 1926 these competitors were finally eliminated through a series of political show trials.<sup>2</sup> In a series of in-

---

<sup>2</sup> For these trials see İeridun Kandemir, *Izmir Suikastının İçyüzü* (Istanbul, Ekiçigil, 1955) and Azmi Nihat Erman, *Izmir Suikastı ve İstiklâl Mahkemeleri* (Istanbul, İemcl, 1971). Kılıç Ali, *İstiklâl Mahkemesi Hatıraları* (Istanbul, Sel, 1955) gives a partial account of the trials by one of the members of the tribunal.

terviews in 1926<sup>3</sup> and in a gigantic six-day speech in 1927<sup>4</sup>, Atatürk then proceeded to give an overview of the recent history of Turkey, in which he covered the Young Turk era, the days of the armistice after the First World War and the history of the national movement from 1919 to 1926.

In the interview and especially in the great speech Atatürk took every opportunity to discredit both the Young Turks and his former colleagues, emphasizing his own role and the novelty and originality of the national movement he had led.<sup>5</sup> Because of Atatürk's stature as saviour of his country and the growing personality cult which surrounded him, this version assumed the status of absolute truth. Even now, Turkish historians generally refrain from challenging this version of their recent history directly. In Turkey, this generally accepted version of the history of the early part of this century has given rise to a periodisation, which is found in every textbook. This periodisation is based on a distinction between three periods: "İkinci Meşrutiyet" (Second Constitutional Period) (1908–1918), "Millî Mücadele" (National Struggle) (1919–1923) and "Cumhuriyet" (Republic) (after 1923).<sup>6</sup> Obviously, this periodisation in itself emphasizes the importance of 1918 as a watershed.

The all-pervasiveness of this historical viewpoint in Turkey, added to the almost total inaccessibility of the Turkish archives for the period, have had the effect of discouraging critical inquiry of its basic tenets, even among foreign historians of the Middle East. The basic novelty and originality of the new Turkish state, and the fact that it was the creation of one man, Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk), has been taken for granted.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The interviews were edited by Falih Rıfki Atay and published in the newspaper *Milliyet*. The part of the interview, which dealt with the period after 1918 was published by Atay in 1944 as a separate booklet, called *19 Mayıs*.

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*. İstanbul, Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1967, 3 Vols. The English translation, *A Speech Delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk 1927*, published in 1963, is notoriously unreliable.

<sup>5</sup> See Erik J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement*. Leiden, Brill, 1984, p. 162.

<sup>6</sup> Sometimes "Mutareke" (the Armistice) is recognized as a separate period. The term is used to describe the period 1918–1919.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Dumont's *Mustafa Kemal invente la Turquie moderne*, which in many ways represents the state of the art in the history of the emergence of modern Turkey,

*Continuity*

In fact, a large measure of continuity existed between the Young Turk era in Ottoman history (1908–1918) and the early history of the “new” Turkey (1918–1945).

Of course, this continuity has its limits. The Turkey which eventually emerged out of the post-War chaos in 1923 was geographically and demographically very different from the Ottoman Empire, even in its last phase, when it had shrunken considerably. Most of the Arab lands, which had been under Ottoman administration before the War had gone. Syria and Lebanon (under French mandate) and Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine (under British mandate) had come in its place. The new Turkey was essentially Anatolia, with a very small quadrangle in the South Eastern Balkans attached to it. Famine, persecution, civil war, emigration, and, finally, a population exchange sponsored by the League of Nations, had seen to it that in Anatolia the large Greek and Armenian minorities had practically disappeared. Anatolia was now ethnically and religiously a much more monolithic country, consisting of a Turkish majority and a Kurdish minority, both of which were largely Sunni muslims. Apart from being more homogeneous, the population was also smaller due to the tremendous population loss caused by ten years of warfare, a loss which in percentage terms has no equal in modern world history, except, possibly, for the case of Cambodia.<sup>8</sup>

But, however great these differences may have been, politically there was a large measure of continuity, because there was such a close resemblance between the two ruling groups of the period, the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress (“İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti”), which ruled the Ottoman Empire for the last ten years of its existence, and the Turkish nationalist, or Kemalist movement, which first re-established Turkish independence after the War and then went on to create the Republic of Turkey.

---

also adheres to the basic tenets of Turkish historiography, as is apparent from its title and from the dates given on the title page 1919–1924

<sup>8</sup> The demographic developments have been described in Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York, New York University Press, 1983). Although McCarthy's use of the Ottoman population statistics has been challenged, his is the most sophisticated attempt to get at the actual numbers involved.

The resemblance and the continuity between these two groups can be charted on three levels: social background, organizational characteristics, and ideology. In this article, I shall first describe the elements of continuity and then proceed to construct a new periodization, based on this continuity, for Turkish history in the first half of the twentieth century. I shall use the term "Unionists" to describe the first group and the term "Kemalists" to describe their post-War successors. The term "Young Turks" is intended to cover both.

### *Social background*

When we talk about the social basis or background of the Young Turk movement, we have to remember that we are not dealing with open, democratic organizations, working in a competitive environment. Therefore, very little can be said about their support among the population at large. It is possible, however, to make some observations about the membership, and especially the leadership of the movements. Biographical research<sup>9</sup> has brought to light a number of common characteristics: to begin with, one has to make what is perhaps a rather obvious point. They were nearly all men. The great majority was Muslim (mostly Turks, with a number of Kurds, Arabs and Albanians), with a small number of Jews and practically no Christians. They were town dwellers, and a majority of the leaders seems to have come from either Macedonia or Istanbul (Thus, even in the Turkey of 1923, with its new capital at Ankara, in the heart of Anatolia, Macedonians made up a large part of the ruling cadres.) Apart from that, their social background seems to have varied a great deal. One encounters sons of great landowners, of Pashas, but also of small-time civil servants and traders. The generalization, sometimes made,<sup>10</sup> that the Young Turks had a petty bourgeois

---

<sup>9</sup> A biographical dictionary of the Turkish national movement is currently being compiled by the author, in collaboration with Mrs N Bilge Criss and other colleagues in Ankara

<sup>10</sup> For instance by Uriel Heyd in *The Cambridge History of Islam Vol 1 The Central Islamic Lands* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p 371, or by Hakkı Keskin in his *Die Türkei Vom Osmanischen Reich zum Nationalstaat* Berlin, Olle und Wolter, p 65, 71

background does not seem to be based in fact. The two characteristics which bound the Young Turks together were education and profession.<sup>11</sup>

The one overwhelming characteristic they shared was that they were products of the new Western-type schools, which had been established in the Empire during the Nineteenth Century for the training of the bureaucracy and the military. They often knew a foreign language (mostly French) and some of them had studied or had had training in Europe.

Professionally, the great majority was state-employed. There were civil servants, doctors, postal officials and schoolteachers, but the majority of the leaders served in the Army as officers. Many of the Unionist leaders, and nearly all of the leading politicians of the Republic, had a military background.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Organizational characteristics*

Organizationally, both the Committee of Union and Progress and the Kemalist national movement had their roots in extra-parliamentarian, unofficial organizations. The Committee came into being as a secret society, organized according to a cell system. After its success in restoring constitution and parliament in 1908 it eventually formed a parliamentary party, but real power always remained with the central committee with the parliamentary fraction playing a secondary role, even if it did not always follow the wishes of the Committee. The Kemalist movement started out as a conglomerate of local and regional resistance movements. After the victory in the Independence War, it reformed itself as the "People's Party" (Halk Fırkası). Evidently, therefore, this party also had extra-parliamentarian roots and during most of the Kemalist era parliament, the "National Assembly", functioned

---

<sup>11</sup> See also Frederick W. Frey, *The Turkish Political Elite* (Cambridge, MA, the MIT press, 1965, chapter three and four)

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that the early republican governments were more heavily dominated by military or former military men than those of the years 1908–1918. I am at a loss to understand how Metin Heper can write "During the period of Union and Progress a military tradition of remaining outside politics had developed." To me quite the opposite seems to be true. (Cf. Metin Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey* (Beverly, Eothen, 1985, p. 53)

more as an extension of the executive than as a real check on the government.<sup>13</sup>

Neither the Union and Progress nor the Kemalist organization, the People's Party, was a real mass-organization. With the Unionists the grass-roots organization consisted of the Unionist clubs in the provincial towns and the People's Party had simply taken over the local resistance organizations, which themselves had been formed by the Unionist clubs in 1918–1919. Despite a rhetoric, in which the terms “nation” and “people” played a prominent part, both organizations were much closer to caucus-type parties than to mass-parties.<sup>14</sup> It is true that both the Committee of Union and Progress and the People's Party at times tried to mobilize public opinion on specific issues, but they never tried to turn their organizations into vehicles for incorporation or mobilization of the masses on a permanent basis, on the pattern of the European socialist or fascist parties.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the formal organizational characteristics, it is important to remember that underneath the formal structure lay a system of informal networks. Informal, personal ties are important in Turkey in every field of human activity, even today, and politics is no exception. But among the politicians of the Young Turk era, this was even more evident. For this, there are two reasons: one is the small number of people involved at the top level. One can safely say that the Unionist and the Kemalist movements were the work of some two hundred men. The second reason is that these people formed a closely-knit group. Almost without exception, they were born between 1875 and 1885. Their networks, their friendships and enmities had been formed in the classrooms of the military and civil service schools. They had been active in the underground movement before 1908 and, in the case of officers, had served together in the almost continuous wars of 1912–1922. Politics in Turkey was and is a highly personal matter, in which personalities are generally

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Maurice Duverger, p. XXX, extra-parliamentary origins of a party generally lead to a subordinate position of the parliamentary fraction.

<sup>14</sup> See Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activities in the Modern State* (London, 1967), p. 17–35.

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Donald Quataert for helping me to clarify my ideas on this point.

lands voluntarily and this they were not prepared to do. This attitude is sometimes contrasted with that of the Kemalists and Atatürk personally, who rejected any kind of irredentism after the establishment of the Republic. But I do not think this constitutes a basic difference between an opportunistic Unionist and a principled (Kemalist) approach. External political circumstances saw to it that the Turks constituted a large majority in the new state, but the inclusion within the new borders of a large Kurdish minority meant that the Kemalists, too, opted for a ‘‘maximum solution’’. The wording of the ‘‘Mısak-ı Milli’’ (National Pact), the platform of the nationalist independence movement, which demanded sovereignty for the Ottoman-Muslim majority, and not for the Turks, is very significant in this respect.<sup>18</sup>

In one respect, the nationalism of the Kemalists differed from that of the Unionists, the expansionist version, ‘Panturkism’, which aimed at the unification of all Turkish peoples in Central Asia under the leadership of Turkey, was an influential movement within the Committee of Union and Progress, especially after 1913. In the Republic, it was never more than an extremist fringe. On the other hand, external political circumstances played a large role in this difference, too, the years after 1913 witnessed first War against Russia and then the collapse of the Russian Empire, which seemed to offer chances of liberation to the Central Asian Turks. The Kemalists, on the other hand, were heavily dependent on Soviet Russian support during their War of Independence. When Russia seemed weak (during the Second World War) and when Turkey was drawn into the Cold War on the side of the West after 1945, Panturkism flared up again in Turkey. It did not receive official government support, however.<sup>19</sup>

The second main characteristic of the Young Turk ideological make-up, after nationalism, was its secularism. Even though they did not hesitate to use Islam for opportunistic reasons (as the

---

<sup>18</sup> For a translation of the text, see Elaine Diane Smith, *Turkey the Origins of the Kemalist Movement and the Government of the Grand National Assembly (1919-1923)* Washington, Judd and Detweiler, 1959, p. 153-154.

<sup>19</sup> For a survey of Panturkist political thought and activity, see Charles Warren Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets* London, Allen and Unwin, 1957, and Jacob Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey A Study in Irredentism* London, Hurst, 1981.



more important than issues and we will only be able fully to understand the politics of this period, if we ever succeed in charting the informal networks with any degree of completeness.

### *Ideology*

The military and civil servants which headed the Young Turk movement were not ideologues, but practical men. Their primary concern, which comes through in all they did and said, was: How can the state be saved and strengthened?<sup>16</sup>

Different answers were given to this question. All Young Turks were agreed that some measure of modernization and Westernization was needed, but they differed on the extent to which this was necessary. They disagreed, too, on the measure of centralization or decentralization which was needed. The central question of what was to be the focus of identification and loyalty in the regenerated state was answered basically in three ways: multi-ethnic Ottoman patriotism, Islamic solidarism or Turkish nationalism.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the fact that before, and even more after, the revolution of 1908 these questions were hotly debated, I think that if one looks at the autobiographical writings of those who constituted the circle which brought about the revolution and which came to power after it, the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress, there can be little doubt that they were already committed to Turkish nationalism, even before 1908. Nor is this surprising, considering their social background as Ottoman officers, largely drawn from the Muslim Turkish segment of the population.

Even if they were Turkish nationalists, the Unionists had to take into account the fact that they were the custodians of a large multinational empire. Politics entirely consistent with their ideology would have forced them to give up the largest part of the Ottoman

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* London, Oxford University Press, 1968 (second edition), p 212

<sup>17</sup> The ideological discussions of this period are treated in many different works, but the following are especially informative François Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri* Ankara, Yurt, 1986 Şerif Mardin, *Continuity and Change in the Ideas of the Young Turks* Istanbul, Robert College, 1969 [?], and Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* Montreal, McGill University, 1964

Unionists did when they raised the standard of the "Jihad", the holy war for Islam, in 1914 and as the Kemalists did when they emphasized the Islamic character of their independence struggle in 1919), basically their outlook and policies were secularist. Their enemies knew this very well, and both movements had to cope with counterrevolutionary movements, which decried them as infidels and demanded the restoration of Islamic law. The Young Turks always vehemently opposed attempts of this type and suppressed fundamentalist movements in 1909 and 1925.

Just as they rejected religious fundamentalism, they also rejected the idea of class struggle. Both before and after the First World War there was a small circle of active socialists and communists in Turkey. The regime in both cases adhered to a vague idea of national solidarity, opposed trade unionism and persecuted the socialists as divisive and anti-national forces.

Another important element in the Young Turk ideological make-up was positivism: the belief that objective truth could be correctly interpreted by the use of scientific methods. As a corollary of this positivism, both the Unionists and the Kemalists had a great, somewhat naive, faith in the power of education as a motor for change.

Finally, both the old etatist tradition in the Ottoman Empire and the military/bureaucratic background of the Young Turks caused them automatically to assume that only the state could serve as the motor of modernization and progress.<sup>20</sup> The liberal ideal of the small state held very little attraction to most of them. This idea really only started to gain adherents in Turkey in the forties, with the growth of a Turkish commercial and industrial bourgeoisie.

In many respects (nationalism, secularism and positivism with its faith in the power of science and education) this ideology was firmly rooted in the traditions of the French revolution. If we try to look for a European source of inspiration which can have had direct in-

---

<sup>20</sup> See Metin Hepar, *The State Tradition in Turkey* Beverly, Eothen, 1985, p 17-19 for an inventory of the work done on the etatist tradition in Turkish politics by Halil İnalcık, Şerif Mardin, Andrew Mango, Alı Kazancıgil and Engın Akarlı. An interesting overview of recent discussions on the problem of the role of the Turkish state in Turkish society and politics is given by Clement Dodd in "Aspects of the Turkish State Political Culture, Organized Interests and Village Communities", *BRISMES Bulletin* 15/1-2 (1988), p 78-86

fluence on the formation of these ideas in Turkey, we find that both the ideas and the attitudes of the Young Turks closely resemble those of the French Radical Party, which saw itself very much as the keeper of the traditions of the Great Revolution in France.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the resemblance in ideological content,<sup>22</sup> there are historical reasons to assume that the Radical Party may have served as an example: many Young Turks had spent some time in Europe (either as fugitives or as students) and especially in France, in the years before 1908, when in France the Radical Party was at its most influential. There may even have been a direct channel of communication between the Radical Party and the Young Turks. The Radical Party in these years was completely dominated by French Freemasonry<sup>23</sup> and a large number of Young Turks, both in France and in the Empire had joined masonic lodges, out of conviction or as a shelter for their political activities.

These are the main social, organizational and ideological elements, which bind together the pre- and post-War Young Turk movements.

My own research<sup>24</sup> has convinced me that not only were the Unionists and the Kemalists indistinguishable socially, ideologically and to a large extent personally, but there exists a causal link between the pre-War and post-War movement. My thesis is that the Committee of Union and Progress in fact took the initiative in starting the national independence struggle after the War, that it helped to launch Atatürk as its leader and that the latter only gradually emerged as the unchallenged leader of what was essentially a Unionist organization. This thesis of course runs counter to the holiest dogmas of Kemalist historiography.

#### *A New Periodization*

Having thus, hopefully, charted the close resemblance, and even the essential continuity between the Young Turk Committee of

---

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, A. Siegfried, *Tableau des partis en France* Paris, Fischbacher, 1930

<sup>22</sup> Duverger has remarked upon the resemblance between the Radical Party and the Republican People's Party in Turkey (Duverger, p. 276)

<sup>23</sup> See Duverger, p. 149–150

<sup>24</sup> See Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, chapters three and four

Union and Progress and the nationalist movement after the First World War, of which Kemal Atatürk's "Republican People's Party" was the final result, we can attempt a new periodization, a periodization which shows up very interesting parallels between the developments in the final decade of the Ottoman Empire and those in the after-War period. This periodization is based on a distinction between three phases, through which both the pre-War and the post-War Young Turk movement seem to have gone.

### *Phase 1*

The Young Turk movement, which brought about the Constitutional Revolution of 1908, was formed by a number of young soldiers and bureaucrats in Macedonia (then still part of the Ottoman Empire) in 1906. Its original name was "Ottoman Freedom Society" but it took on the name "Committee of Union and Progress" after merging with the older Paris-based opposition movement of that name in 1907. It was an illegal, secret society, which infiltrated the Ottoman bureaucracy and, most importantly, the Ottoman Army. Its programme really consisted of one point only: restoration of the Ottoman constitution of 1876 (which had been suspended for thirty years by the autocratic regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II) and of the Ottoman parliament.

### *Phase 2*

In 1908 the Committee, through an armed insurrection, forced the government to give in. Constitution and parliament were restored. In the five years that followed, between 1908 and 1913, the Committee came into the open and was the dominant political force in the country, but it did not hold a monopoly of power. A number of political parties and organizations were active, some of them offshoots of the original Committee. There was a lively political debate, stimulated by, and echoed in, an active and relatively free press. In 1912, the Committee was even ousted from power.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1969, is still the best description of this period.

*Phase 3*

This situation came to an abrupt end in 1913, when, during the national crisis caused by the Balkan War, with the Bulgarian Army only twenty miles from the capital, the Committee decided to carry out a coup d'état, because it feared the government was about to give in to the Bulgarians. After the coup, the opposition was suppressed (with the most prominent opposition leaders leaving the country), and until the end of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was a one-party state, in which the official democratic apparatus, notably parliament, exercised nominal control, but in which in effect all power lay with a small group of party-leaders.<sup>26</sup>

It is during this dictatorial phase that the Unionist government undertook a number of important secularizing and modernizing reforms.

Now let us consider the post-War situation:

*Phase 1*

The national, or "Kemalist", movement sprang up as an illegal armed resistance movement, which fought the occupying Entente powers and, eventually, the official Turkish government in Istanbul, which cooperated with the Entente. Its programme was in effect limited to one point: recognition of the Turkish national rights, i.e. complete sovereignty within the armistice lines.

*Phase 2*

In 1922 the Nationalists scored a complete victory in the War of Independence. The resistance movement, which in 1923 reformed itself as a political party, the "People's Party", took control of the whole country, but in the years that followed there were a number of attempts at political opposition, and in 1924 a number of prominent leaders of the national movement left the "People's Party" to

---

<sup>26</sup> Although the military history and the economic history of the War years have received a great deal of attention, a political history of this period still waits to be written

form an official opposition party. This initiative was supported by a large part of the very active and relatively free press of the period.<sup>27</sup>

### *Phase 3*

This budding democracy was abruptly brought to an end in early 1925, when the People's Party, confronted by a large-scale Kurdish insurrection in the East of the country and perceiving the state to be in danger, gave dictatorial powers to the government through the adoption of the "Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu" (Law on the Maintenance of Order). This law was then used to suppress the opposition (a number of prominent opposition leaders leaving the country in 1925). All opposition newspapers were closed down. During the years that followed, and up to 1946, all the trimmings of a democratic apparatus remained in place (notably the "National Assembly"), but real power lay with a small circle of party officials around Kemal Atatürk, the President of the Republic.

The party, and the government, used their monopoly of power to push through the extensive programme of reforms aimed at secularizing and modernizing Turkish society, sometimes described as the Turkish revolution.

To my mind, the parallels just described, with the Unionist and the Kemalist movement both going through three distinct phases: a resistance phase (1906–1908 and 1919–1922 respectively), a pluralistic phase (1908–1913 and 1922–1925) and a dictatorial phase (1913–1918 and 1925–1945) are both clear and interesting.

Are they also important? I think they are, because they suggest that a movement such as the Young Turk one, has some very fundamental contradictions built into its fabric. As we have seen, the basic question these reformists put to themselves was: How can this state be saved?, and the answers they gave were: by introducing a form of representative government and by modernizing and secularizing society. However, in the Turkish environment of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Both this episode and the subsequent suppression of the opposition form the subject of Erik J. Zürcher, *The Progressive Republican Party The First Opposition Party of the Turkish Republic* Leiden, Brill, 1991

first half of this century, the bourgeois ideology of the Young Turks, composed of nationalism, secularism and positivism was not supported by its "natural" proponent, an indigenous bourgeoisie. The Ottoman Empire had known an expanding bourgeoisie in its final years, but this bourgeoisie was almost exclusively Christian. It had disappeared in the years between 1914 and 1923. Both the Unionist and the Kemalist regime made it their policy to create an indigenous Turkish bourgeoisie, but this process took a generation.<sup>28</sup> The ideology was supported only by a military/bureaucratic elite, who forced its policies on an economically largely pre-capitalist and culturally conservative and religious society of peasants and craftsmen. The population resented both the secularism and the imitation of European culture which were characteristic of the Young Turk policies and any kind of real democracy would almost certainly have meant the end of the reforms. This was the dilemma the reformist regimes faced, and they both in the end solved it in the same way.

In each of the two movements, the inherent divisions between those who emphasized democratic ideals, and those who gave priority to modernization, even at the expense of democracy, were held in check during the phase in which the movement was still struggling to reach its primary aims, but a split took place soon after victory was achieved. In both cases, too, it was the second group, that of the people who gave absolute priority to the modernization, who, after a period of a few years, monopolized power and embarked on a policy of westernizing reforms. The main reason that this could happen so quickly and easily to my mind lies in the fact that for the Young Turks democracy was not a goal, but a means toward the ultimate goal of saving and strengthening the state.

The Union and Progress regime, during its dictatorial phase, had

---

<sup>28</sup> See Feroz Ahmad, "Vanguard of a Nascent Bourgeoisie the Social and Economic Policy of the Young Turks 1908-1918" in Osman Okyar and Halil İnalcık, *Türkiye'nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071-1920)* Ankara, 1980 Also published as "Doğmakta Olan bir Burjuvazının oykusu Genç Türklerin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Politikası 1908-1918" in Feroz Ahmad, *İttihatçılıktan Kemalizme* İstanbul, Kaynak, 1985, p 34-80 Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Millî İktisat (1908-1918)* Ankara, Yurt, 1982 is an exhaustive study of the economic policies of the C U P Çağlar Keyder's discussion of the problem of the missing bourgeoisie in his *State and Class in Turkey A Study in Capitalist Development* London, Verso, 1987, p 49-90, is very illuminating

an obvious justification for its authoritarian policies in the national emergency, created by the World War. Except for the period of the Kurdish rebellion and of the Second World War, the Kemalist regime had no such excuse. It remained conscious of—and paid lip service to—the democratic ideal all through the twenties and thirties, while continuing to suppress dissident movements. It found its ideological justification in the education of the people, which was supposed to ready it for full-blown democracy in the long run. Ever since 1908 the role of the educator had played a large part in the self-image of the reformists, but in the Kemalist era this was greatly emphasized. Pictures of Atatürk depicted as a teacher (with blackboard and all) were among the most popular of the period.

If we see the Kemalist “revolution” for what it was: an extension of the Young Turk movement, in which the policies of that movement were taken one step further, but based on the same concepts and attitudes, it will help us to understand modern developments in Turkey, especially the changes which took place after World War II. Internal pressure from the bourgeoisie, which at last felt strong enough to challenge the military/bureaucracy’s hold on power, and external pressure from the United States, whose political and economic support Turkey needed, combined to force the government to introduce real multi-party politics. The competition between the parties gave the majority of the people, the conservative Muslim peasants, a chance to express their rejection of the authoritarian and secular policies and ideology of the Kemalists. The resurgence of Islam from the fifties onwards was not the growing of a new conservatism, but rather a reflection of the reality of Turkish society, which had been obscured by the Kemalist monopoly of the media and the political process. By the same token it was not a counterrevolution following a Kemalist revolution, because there never had been a Kemalist revolution (at least not a *social* revolution), only an attempt by the ruling military/bureaucratic elite to reshape society from above, according to a limited nineteenth-century concept of modernization.

The “People’s Party” was forced into the opposition, something for which it was ill-fitted. It was geared to teaching and ordering, not to listening or agitating. The People’s Party never succeeded in getting the support of a majority of the electorate and



from the late sixties onwards developed into a social-democratic party.

On the other hand, the Young Turk tradition—nationalism, secularism, positivism with a strong accent on the role of the state and on the role of education—remained the guiding ideology of the bureaucracy and of the armed forces. The military coups which have occurred with ten-year intervals in Turkey (in 1960, 1971 and 1980) can certainly be seen as attempts of the Kemalist bureaucratic/military elite to retain power and enforce its ideals, and, at the same time, as signs that it is still true that real democracy is incompatible with its particular brand of modernization in contemporary Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> I do not subscribe to Metin Heper's optimistic assertion that the Turkish military have proved to be an institution that learns and that "unlike the bureaucratic intelligentsia in Turkey [has] come to believe in the common sense of the people" (Heper, *The State Tradition*, p. 151–152)