

Opposition in Ankara: Transition to the Single-Party System

Thinking of all that he had gone through in the hard days, it was almost touching to see Mustafa Kemal Pasha's exuberant joy.

"After you take Smyrna, Pasha, you will rest, you have struggled so hard."

"Rest; what rest? After the Greeks we will fight each other, we will eat each other."

"Why should we?" I said. "There will be an enormous amount to do in the way of reconstruction."

"What about the men who have opposed me?"

"Well, it was natural in a National Assembly."

He had been talking in a bantering tone, but now his eyes sparkled dangerously as he mentioned the names of two men from the second group (the name of the opposition party in those days).

"I will have those lynched by the people. No, we will not rest, we will kill each other."

Halide Edib Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 355¹

This conversation, which must have taken place in 1922 between Halide Edib (Adivar), one of the most influential women in the War of Independence, and Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the founder of the new Turkish Republic, was indicative of the period of the power struggle that was to follow the War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal was keenly aware of this fact and was readying himself for another battle on the political front. Halide Edib informs us that in that conversation, Mustafa Kemal, named Hafız Mehmed (Mehmet) Bey, the ex-commissioner of

interior, was executed in İzmir in 1926 by the new regime's Independence Tribunals. Halide Edib continues,

Though I did not take these words seriously, they were symptomatic. We were at the beginning of the final realization of our dream. Was he going to use his power, a power achieved at the cost of such national sacrifice, for petty grudges? He deserved the highest price he could ask from the nation for his services; but his desire for revenge for political purposes expressed so early was nauseating. I looked at İsmet Pasha. He was eating his dinner quietly.

"When the struggle ends," he continued, "it will be dull; we must find some other excitement, Hanum Effendi."²

Indeed, one of the most significant and consequential developments that shaped the nature and future of the Turkish state stems from the power struggle that took place in the early years of the new regime. As the above quotation indicates, Mustafa Kemal was conscious of this possibility. Among the respected figures who led in the War of Independence that ended in 1922, he was one of the earliest leaders who positioned himself for such a power struggle. There is not any doubt that Mustafa Kemal emerged as the supreme leader of the new state after an initial and relatively short period of a power struggle that lasted only five years between 1920, when the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) was inaugurated, to 1925, when a law called *Takrir-i Sükun* (Law on the Maintenance of Order) was passed. This law virtually eliminated any and all future opposition to Mustafa Kemal and to his inner circle. Throughout republican history, it has been regarded as the most significant example of authoritarianism that the Kemalists demonstrated during the early years of the republic. In the light of conclusive evidence, the Kemalists did not question the undemocratic and extrajudicial nature of the early Turkish Republic. Instead, they developed counterarguments suggesting that such heavy-handed policies were necessary to protect the infant regime.³

There are many questions, however, that remain unanswered. The most significant of these is the suspicion that events leading up to the *Takrir-i Sükun* and its immediate aftermath were manipulated or even perhaps manufactured by the Kemalists to silence the opposition. At the present, there exists no evidence to suggest that either the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925, which seemingly paved the way for the *Takrir-i Sükun*, or the İzmir assassination attempt of Mustafa Kemal in 1926

was manufactured. But did the Kemalists manipulate or exaggerate the Sheikh Said Revolt to silence the political, intellectual, and possible popular opposition?

This chapter examines this question within the context of the *Takrir-i Sükun*. It also examines the consequences of this law preventing political opposition from taking root in Turkey. The lack of political opposition in Turkey, particularly in the years leading up to the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938 and even until the transition to the multi-party system in 1946, proved to be significant for the adoption of the Kemalist reforms—reforms that gave the new regime its character.

For a more complete treatment of the subject matter, one should begin the investigation with the period prior to the *Takrir-i Sükun*. There were other laws in the Turkish penal code that helped silence the political opposition. Among those enacted in this vein, the most significant one was the Law on High Treason (*Hıyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu*), which was passed by the newly formed parliament six days after its formation. Let us briefly look at this law.

CREATION OF OPPOSITION AND LEGAL MANEUVERINGS TO ELIMINATE IT PRIOR TO THE TAKRIR-I SÜKUN

As a newly formed regime, the most immediate need for the TGNA was to establish its authority in the country. In order to achieve this, the TGNA immediately passed a law forbidding any opposition to the authority of the newly formed parliament.

The Law on High Treason (*Hıyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu*)

This law, number 2, was enacted by parliament on April 29, 1920, and remained in effect until 1991. The original stated intention of the law was to protect the office of the sultanate and the caliphate as well as the Ottoman territories. The law had 14 articles, but the first three reveal the nature of the law very clearly:

Article 1.

Those, by means of publication, active participation or public speech, who oppose and undermine the legitimacy of the Grand National Assembly, which was formed to save the office of the exalted Caliphate and Sultanate and the Ottoman state, from the hands of foreigners are considered traitors.

Article 2.

Those who commit the act of high treason will be executed by hanging . . .

Article 3

Those who, by means of public speeches and religious sermons openly incite and encourage various people for high treason and those who commit these acts by these kinds of encouragement and other various venues, face temporary imprisonment. If these incitements result in disturbances, the inciters face the capital punishment.

Clearly, this law intended to establish the authority of the TGNA, which described itself as the defender of the office of the caliphate and the sultanate. The main aim of article 1 was to silence the political opposition outside the TGNA. For this reason, the bill passed parliament quickly and became the second piece of legislation that was enacted by this legislative body. After the new parliament established itself in Ankara—at the expense of the imperial İstanbul government—and especially after the separation of the office of the caliphate from that of the sultanate and finally abolition of the sultanate, the TGNA amended article 1 of the Law on High Treason on April 15, 1923. The new law, number 334, stipulated the following:

Article 1

The first article of the Law on High Treason was amended as below.

Those, by means of publication, active participation or public speech, who oppose and undermine the legitimacy of the Grand National Assembly . . . and those *who contest the law dated November 1, 1922 concerning the abolition of the sultanate*, [emphasis added] are considered traitors.

This amendment is the first indication that the emerging regime was readying itself for the offensive to eliminate not only the old regime but also, more important, those who criticized its decisions.⁴ In other words, the original article 1 was limited in the sense that it included only those who questioned the legitimacy of the TGNA. The amendment broadened the scope of the opposition to parliament; it now included those who accepted the legitimacy but criticized its decisions. This is a significant departure, for it signaled the era that the TGNA protected its decisions by classifying any opposition as high treason.

Law number 334 was the last piece of legislation of the first TGNA; the next day, it dissolved itself. As it is known, the first TGNA afforded political opposition to its members and contained two opposing groups. The First Group was formed by Mustafa Kemal and his close associates, some of whom, after the collapse of the Second Group, formed a weak opposition in the second TGNA. The Second Group included more conservative-minded members and distinguished itself by openly challenging what they regarded as Mustafa Kemal's "one man leadership."⁵ During the campaign season in the spring of 1923, Mustafa Kemal asked the First Group members to base their own campaigns on the Nine Principles (*Dokuz Umde*), which included the affirmation of the abolition of the sultanate yet confirmed its loyalty to the office of the caliphate.⁶ Some people have suggested that the amendment made it impossible to challenge the First Group's program, for doing so could readily be interpreted as a crime that was described in the amended article 1.⁷ This could be true only for the Second Group politicians, who wanted to base their campaign on the revival of the sultanate. However, not all Second Group politicians were in favor of the sultanate, as not all members of the First Group were anti-sultan. The Second Group members could have challenged the First Group on other grounds and campaigned over many other issues. It might be a contributing factor, but it seems unjustified to put the blame for the failure of the Second Group members in the elections entirely on the amendment in the High Treason Law.

This is not to say, however, that Mustafa Kemal Pasha did not push for the election of the First Group nominees. On the contrary, he was actively involved in the process through the speeches he made and the alliances he formed.⁸ Mete Tunçay describes this election as "the guided elections" (*güdümlü seçimler*).⁹ There is no question that Mustafa Kemal tried to control the election process and to influence the outcome. Nevertheless, this should not suggest that the elections were fixed since Mustafa Kemal hoped to defeat the Second Group at the ballot box.¹⁰ Yet it is fair to state that the Second Group candidates suffered from the lack of a nationally organized party and a charismatic leader who demanded respect, as did Mustafa Kemal.

The elections for the second TGNA were clear indicators that Mustafa Kemal wished to have a parliament in which the opposition to his vision was minimal to say the least. For that reason, many First Group candidates were nominated by Mustafa Kemal himself. Maynard B. Barnes, an American consul and a delegate of the U.S. High Commission in Turkey, cites a conversation with an unnamed

“prominent Turk” regarding the elections in Turkey. “You know of course,” the unnamed Turks states, “that we do not really have elections in Turkey, instead we have nominations.”¹¹ This statement hints at Mustafa Kemal’s growing influence on the political landscape of Turkey.

In the end, virtually all members of the Second Group lost their seats; only three independent candidates were elected as the opposition. This election result enabled the Kemalist faction (the First Group) to control the TGNA entirely, and this also afforded Mustafa Kemal an extraordinary power, a kind that he did not possess during the tenure of the first TGNA. However, until the *Takrir-i Sükun* in 1925, some form of opposition, in addition to the three independent deputies, still existed within the ruling party, albeit it was less prominent than that of the Second Group.

The backbone of the opposition in the second TGNA came from the members of the First Group (later became Republican People’s Party [RPP]). The inner-party disagreements finally resulted in the emergence of the first political party in the opposition under the name of the Progressive Republican Party (PRP; *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*).

The Creation of the PRP as the First Opposition Party¹²

Differences in the second TGNA generally stemmed not from the content or the spirit of the laws discussed in parliament but rather from the methods employed to pass them. This was the main difference between the opposition in the first and the second TGNA. Most (though not all) members of the group that formed the PRP shared a political vision similar to that of Mustafa Kemal for the modernization of the state. Yet they were more responsive to the demands of the public and hence can be described as evolutionists. On the other hand, the other group, often regarded as the revolutionists, believed that there was no time to waste in introducing and promoting new reforms. People needed to be led, and the reforms, if possible, had to be forced top down for the good of the country. This line of thinking reminded the opposition in and out of parliament of the Young Turk period, in which the slogan “for the people, by the people” was replaced with “for the people, despite the people.”¹³

The most visible example for the disagreement in parliament was, without a doubt, the declaration of the republic. As it was known, the republic was proclaimed on October 29, 1923, without any substantial discussion in the TGNA. The fact that such a significant decision as

the labeling of the new regime was acted on by Mustafa Kemal and a small group of his ardent followers caused frustration and disappointment among many members of the opposition. Opposition leaders, such as Kazım Karabekir Pasha, Rauf Bey, and Ali Fuat Pasha, were not present or even informed of parliament's decision. Rauf Bey, a former prime minister and a political rival of Mustafa Kemal,¹⁴ learned of the proclamation in İstanbul from the press. Upset that he was kept uninformed, he gave an interview to two İstanbul daily newspapers, *Vatan* and *Tevhid-i Efkar*, on this subject and criticized the government for acting hastily without proper consultation and discussions.¹⁵ In response, the RPP called its members to a meeting in which Rauf's statements were discussed and Rauf himself was asked to explain his position. The general accusation that was leveled against Rauf Bey was that he was anti-republican and pro-sultanate, which continued to be the main slogan to taint his loyalty to the new regime.¹⁶ When asked to state his position on record regarding republicanism, Rauf stated, "I am in favor of people determining their faith without any condition. [If] this is called republicanism and I am a republican (*Cumhuriyetçiyim*)."¹⁷ Here, Rauf's qualification of republicanism based on the will of the people hints at his dissatisfaction with Mustafa Kemal and the radical elements who evoked democracy and republicanism but, Rauf feared, paid only lip service to them. It was not long after that Rauf became fully convinced of Mustafa Kemal's authoritarian tendencies.

In an editorial published in *The Times* of London, Rauf did not spare the word "dictator" to describe Mustafa Kemal. In a response to the accusations Mustafa Kemal leveled against Rauf Bey and his colleagues in PRP as traitors, Rauf wrote,

To the editor of The Times

Sir, I have read all the dispatches of your Correspondent in Constantinople concerning speech of the President of the Turkish Republic, Mustapha Kemal Pasha, who is at the same time the leader of the People's Party, and in all of them the Ghazi not only speaks of Kiazim Kara Bekir Pasha, Refet Pasha, Ali Fuad Pasha, and myself as persons who have not served during the struggle for independence, but also accuses us of having created difficulties and of having upheld the Sultanate, and thus tried to lead the country into anarchy. And he further accuses the Progressive Party, which we had formed with the express desire of establishing a serious democracy and of preventing a *personal dictatorship* [emphasis added], which at all times and at all places ends in

national disaster, of being reactionary and of being the cause of the Kurdish Revolt [Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925].

Mustapha Kemal Pasha, who has led the Turkish Army to victory in the struggle for national independence, has used the prestige and glory attached to his name to establish a *dictatorship* [emphasis added], and I see with regret that, in order to excuse and to show the necessity for the atrocities and corruptions of the last few years, he has falsified important historical events. I intended eventually to publish documents which will throw light on these events as they actually occurred. To-day there is no freedom of speech or conscience in Turkey; but if the Dictator will allow me to publish these documents and will publicly promise that the persons mentioned in them will neither be prosecuted nor killed, I shall be glad to do so in the Turkish press.¹⁸

These statements were made in 1927, when Mustafa Kemal had already established himself as the supreme leader with the authority to govern single-handedly. We do not know exactly when Rauf became convinced of Mustafa Kemal's "dictatorship."

In any case, the PRP was formed on November 17, 1924, by Mustafa Kemal's former close associates, including such prominent names as Ali Fuad Pasha (Cebesoy), Refet Pasha (Bele), Rauf Bey (Orbay), and Dr. Adnan Bey (Adıvar). Kazım Karabekir, not Rauf, became the president of the party. It is worth mentioning that just over a year earlier, on November 22, 1923, in the previously mentioned meeting in which Rauf Bey's loyalty to republicanism was questioned, he strongly stated that forming an opposition party was against the interest of the new state and that he would not establish any opposition party:

I do not understand; do they [my opponents] wish me to establish an opposition party? I will not form an opposition party, because forming such a party conflicts with the high interest of the state. . . . Friends, I will not form a party. If you expel me from the party [RPP], I will go . . . but I will not form a party.¹⁹

Again, we do not know exactly when Rauf changed his mind before he fully committed himself to the establishment of an opposition party. The minutes of the Ankara Independence Tribunal that tried former CUP members in Ankara regarding the infamous İzmir assassination attempt of Mustafa Kemal in 1926 includes the testimony of Ahmet Emin Bey (Yalman), the head columnist of *Vatan*. In responding to a question, Ahmet Emin Bey mentioned that Rauf visited him on

October 15, 1924, and told him that he was interested in forming an opposition party.²⁰ However, the idea must have been discussed among the founders of the PRP earlier than this date.²¹ There is no reason to believe that Rauf entertained the idea of forming a party prior to 1923. What is noteworthy here is the total reversal of his decision and of his reasoning within one year. This indicates his frustration with the rank and file of the RPP.

Mustafa Kemal's Attitude toward the Creation of the PRP

Historical records contain contradictory information regarding Mustafa Kemal's attitude toward the new opposition party. In their memoirs, some members of Mustafa Kemal's inner circle claim that he welcomed the idea of having an oppositional party in parliament, for it served the interest of democracy. For example, Kılıç Ali, a close associate of Mustafa Kemal, remembers that "the Ghazi responded positively to the emergence of an oppositional political party in the TGNA. However, he was suspicious of the intention of several high ranking military commanders when they together entered the politics."²²

Mustafa Kemal may have been suspicious of the activities of his political rivals. However, we have a British archival source reporting to London of an interview that took place between Mustafa Kemal, as the president of the republic, and Maxwell Macartney, the İstanbul correspondent of *The Times* of London. This interview, which took place on November 21, 1924, is mentioned in a consular report sent to London on November 25, 1924, by Ambassador Ronald Lindsay, the British ambassador of Turkey. The consular report is most revealing with a postscript attached to Macartney's interview. In it, based on Macartney's description of the way the interview was conducted, the British ambassador includes his own assessment of Mustafa Kemal's reaction to the formation of the PRP. The postscript reads,

If I have been wondering what the President will do next, here is an answer for me in this very remarkable document [the Macartney interview]. The Progressives are insincere in their republicanism, their programme is a fraud, and they are mere reactionaries. Everything reported implies that the President will have nothing to do with the new opposition, and his language to Mr. Macartney, not reported, and the tone of his remarks indicated clearly that *he meant war to the knife* [emphasis added]. The Ghazi worked himself into a perfect frenzy; he turned red in the face as he ticked off each

member of the opposition in turn, characterizing them as ungrateful to himself, to whom they owed all, and traitors to their country. The deputy who acted at the interview as introducer and half as interpreter interrupted more than once, exclaiming: Be calm "Ghazi Pasha, do not be so indiscreet," but nothing could check the flood of indignation. Mr. Macartney has come away from Angora thinking that pistols will be going off in earnest in a very short time, and that Vassif and Nejati have left the government in order to come down to Constantinople at the head of a more businesslike Tribunal of Independence which will decorate the Galata Bridge with hanging of corpses.²³

This report has been quoted by two scholars, Erik Jan Zürcher and Mete Tunçay. Both scholars indicate that Macartney complied with Mustafa Kemal's request and waited to publish the interview in *The Times*. Meanwhile, the Turkish newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* published it on December 11, 1924, albeit in a highly modified form.²⁴ After this, Tunçay, relying apparently on Zürcher, claims that *The Times* gave up on publishing the interview, for it lost its news value.²⁵ However, the interview was indeed published in *The Times* on December 18, 1924, without any mention of Mustafa Kemal's "frenzy."²⁶ Nor did any of the observations exist that were mentioned in Ambassador Lindsay's report. No explanation was offered for the discrepancy.

Even before this interview, Mustafa Kemal did not keep secret his thoughts about an opposition party in general. In a speech he delivered on September 20, 1924, in Samsun, Mustafa Kemal made his position very clear:

Today we stand at the head of a clear-cut road. The distance covered is as yet too small to influence our plans. All positions must first acquire the necessary clarity and precision. Until that has happened, the thought of having more than one party is common partisanship and, ladies and gentlemen, from a point of view of order and safety of our country and nation the conditions to open the way for the establishment of more than one party have not been met yet.²⁷

Although his close associates tried to soften Mustafa Kemal's position in relation to political opposition in their memoirs, there is sufficient evidence for us to believe that Mustafa Kemal did not approve of the formation of the PRP as a political opposition the leaders of which had the potential to replace his leadership.

One More Amendment

As the political realities in the new era changed, the TGNA felt the need to amend the very same article one more time with law number 556, which passed on February 26, 1925. The date coincides with the immediate aftermath of the Sheikh Said Revolt, the religious and Kurdish nationalist aspects of which are still being debated. However, one thing is hardly questioned, namely, that the Naqhsbandi facade and participation in the rebellion enabled the Kemalists to further pressure and silence the ulama, which, for centuries, established itself inside and outside the Ottoman state machinery.²⁸

However, it was not only the religious establishment that was targeted. Law number 556 availed itself of any interpretation of political action that made direct or indirect references to religion. In other words, the law aimed at those who used religion as a platform for their discontent, those whose discontent centered around religion, and those who made any reference to religion for political gain. The amended article 1 included the following: "Formation of societies by using religion for political purposes is forbidden. Those who establish and become members of such organizations are considered traitors."²⁹

This amendment afforded the Kemalists better opportunities to restrict their opponents' political moves. Since the majority of them came from "conservative" backgrounds and since religion was an integral part of their identity and of their political platform, the opposition lost its main justification to campaign for votes and to establish sustainable opposition in parliament. It is noteworthy to point out that when this amendment passed, the PRP was in parliament and overwhelmingly voted for the amendment. The amendment passed the TGNA immediately after the inauguration of the Sheikh Said Revolt without any objection. This rebellion, thus, served as a catalyst in the political process in which the opposition was silenced and the PRP closed down. Therefore, it is mandatory that we examine certain aspects of the rebellion.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SHEIKH SAID REVOLT AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Sheikh Said Revolt commenced on February 13, 1925, in Piran (later Dicle, administratively tied to Diyarbakır). The rebels quickly captured many towns in the region and came as far as Diyarbakır.

Initially, the rebels were successful in defeating several local military units; however, when the government mobilized and dispatched larger units, the rebellion was contained in two months. Sheikh Said and his 47 followers were tried and hanged on June 29, 1925.

This revolt has been regarded in republican history as one of the greatest internal challenges to the new Turkish state. However, at the same time, it is often postulated that the Sheikh Said Revolt provided Mustafa Kemal with the appropriate milieu in which to complete his radical reforms without any political opposition. According to Metin Toker, son-in-law of İsmet Pasha (İnönü), who became the prime minister at the time of the revolt, the new reforms were incompatible with the freedom that the Kemalists pledged. Hence, in order to eliminate the opposition and to introduce the reforms, the Kemalists postponed implementing democracy, and this revolt was instrumental in that regard.³⁰ We examine this proposition in greater detail, for it had significant ramifications for the future of the new Turkish state. But now, let us begin by making several observations about the revolt.

Since many publications have dealt with the narrative and nature of this rebellion,³¹ I limit myself here by introducing some unexplored archival documents and making some observations regarding the revolt. Following these observations, I examine the timetable of the government's response to the rebellion, which is directly related to the subject under examination.

The first observation concerns the cost of the rebellion, which reveals clues about the financial impact of the revolt on the new regime. If the Turkish government fomented the rebellion in order to conspire against the newly formed political opposition, it would be reasonable to expect that a sufficient budget had been allocated to organize the rebellion. On this aspect, much conflicting information exists.³² According to U.S. consular reports, which so far have not been utilized to study this revolt, the TGNA approved a budget of 10 million Turkish lira (US\$5 million) for the arms purchases from Poland.³³ On March 27, 1925, the U.S. military attaché in Turkey stated in his report that "the Turkish Minister of National Defense told a foreign military attaché that the expenses of his department [for] the suppression of the Kurdish revolt would be 7.000.000 Turkish pounds [or lira, approximately US\$3.5 million] up to the 1st of April."³⁴ Another U.S. report confirms this number, indicating the Turkish Joint Chief of Staff as its source.³⁵ The same figure of 7 million Turkish pounds was given, this time to the Italian military attaché. The U.S. observers seemed to be surprised about such a high expense for the suppression

of the rebellion, for it seemed that the revolt was not a very successful one. However, the U.S. diplomats concluded that the Turkish minister or joint chief of staff had no reason to exaggerate.³⁶

Another U.S. document informs us of the total figure of the cost. On August 27, 1925, Sheldon L. Crosby, the U.S. chargé d'affaires, relayed a valuable report by an unnamed U.S. military attaché to Washington. This report details the Turkish budget for 1925 and the estimated cost of the Sheikh Said Revolt.³⁷ According to this report, the budget for the fiscal year from March 1, 1925, to February 28, 1926, was 153,046,854 Turkish pounds (US\$84,175,770), and the expenditure was 183,932,777 Turkish pounds (US\$101,163,030), which created a deficit of 30,885,923 Turkish pounds (US\$15,987,250).³⁸ Another report, titled "Cost of Suppression of Kurdish Rebellion," indicates that

the [Turkish] government officially published ten million Turkish pounds as the cost of the suppression of the uprising. However, government officials now admit that the cost is twenty million pounds, and information comes from a reliable source that the cost is thirty million pounds. The latter estimate is believed to be nearer correct. The amount does include the pay and upkeep of the forces mobilized.³⁹

These figures indicate that 16.3 percent of the total budget of the fiscal year 1925–1926 went to the suppression of the rebellion.

If the U.S. estimates on the cost of the rebellion were correct, then this figure nearly matched the budget deficit. By all accounts, the cost of 60,000,000 liras given by Süreyya Bedirhan seems to be an exaggeration, as was the estimation by Hamid Bozarslan, who claims that 35 percent of the total budget went to the suppression of this revolt.⁴⁰ In any case, the cost of the rebellion was an additional burden on the Turkish government. Accordingly, we can safely assume that the rebellion was a major reason for the budget deficit and that the government was unprepared for the revolt, at least financially. In other words, even if the Turkish government planted the rebellion, financially it was not prepared for it. However, this certainly does not mean that Ankara did not exaggerate and manipulate the rebellion in terms of its danger to the emerging state and its potential for a counterrevolution supported by the political opposition.

Another observation can be made regarding the British involvement in the rebellion. Here also, we can look at the U.S. consular reports, which include accounts regarding this issue. For example, reports in two files, numbers 867.00/1853 and 1855, inform us that

the general belief in Turkey was that Sheikh Said had been on the British payroll from 1918 to 1922. This report hardly goes beyond informing Washington of the rumors circulating in Turkey; no conclusive evidence is available for this claim.⁴¹ The Turkish side long maintained that the British incited the rebellion in order to get concessions on the Mosul issue.

On the other side, rather interestingly, some British archival sources make the opposite claim. One particular claim speculates that it was probably the Turks who planted the rebellion. Coming from a British intelligence analyst, this is an extraordinary allegation. If properly documented, this claim could certainly present the conclusive evidence that we have been seeking regarding the Kemalists' incitement of the revolt. However, the report does not go beyond speculation. We encounter this British report in FO 371/10867, in which James Morgan, a British intelligence analyst, speculates on the reasons why Turkey would support and benefit from the Sheikh Said Revolt:

It is known that His Majesty's Government at *one time or another have interested themselves in a Kurdish State* [emphasis added], and a good portion of the inhabitants of the Mosul Vilayet are Kurds. The Turks seek to regain possession of the Mosul Vilayet partly because they do not wish the Kurds of that Vilayet to remain under British control, and in time to become the nucleus of an independent Kurdistan under British influence which would attract to itself Kurdish territories now under Turkish rule, or at least from a focus of dissatisfaction against Turkey to the Kurds inhabiting Turkey.

If the present rising has been engineered by Angora and exists, attracting to itself, numerous "deserters" from the Turkish regular forces. We may hear that the successful rebels have determined to free their brothers in the Mosul Vilayet, and for that purpose have crossed the present frontier, aided by the deserting Turkish troops, in order to take possession of Mosul. If this were so, they would, on obtaining possession of the Mosul Vilayet, probably surrender to Turkey, leaving Turkey in possession of the conquered territory.

Another possibility is that a successful rising in Turkey (countenanced by Angora) might be taken as a pretext for a rising of Kurds in Irak (also engineered by Angora) to throw off the Irak yoke and proclaim union with the Turkish Kurds, all ultimately submitting to Angora.

A further possibility is that the rising may afford a pretext for a concentration of Turkish troops on the Irak frontier, who might ultimately find it their duty to pursue flying Turkish rebels across the Irak border.

The [Turkish]⁴² government pretended to take the view that the movement is reactionary and due to certain influences playing on the religious instincts of the rebels. The attempt to use religion as a cloak for treason is strongly condemned. At the same time reactionary and religious movement afford the Government the opportunity of seeking out under cover of martial law of its opponents of whatever colour and of dealing with them. While martial law has not been declared in Constantinople, the idea has been mooted, and it may be that "Independence Tribunals" will again be set up there.⁴³

First, it must be noted that this view was not uniformly accepted by British intelligence analysts.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, what is interesting about this report is that it reverses the Turkish claim that the Mosul issue was the primary motive for the belief that Great Britain incited or supported the Sheikh Said Revolt. This report suggests that the very same issue could be interpreted to support the opposite claim—that is, the Turks fomented the revolt for the control of Mosul. Incidentally, this report is also one of the rare ones by a British officer to solidly confirm the interest of the British government in establishing a Kurdish state.

However, James Morgan's "Memorandum" is particularly insightful, as it suspected that another reason for the Turks planting the revolt would be the elimination of the religious opposition. Here we should remember that this report was dated March 4, 1925, which was the same date as the passing of the *Takrir-i Sükun* in parliament. It is likely that the report was sent before the British had full knowledge of the content of the *Takrir-i Sükun*; this would certainly further validate the British suspicion that the rebellion could be used as a pretext to deal with the religious opposition. Furthermore, British analysts also entertained the possibility that the same revolt could be manipulated to silence the entire political and intellectual opposition in Turkey, not just the religious one. It must be repeated that there exists no conclusive evidence to substantiate the Kemalist instigation of the revolt. We have the court reports and eyewitness accounts regarding the trial of Sheikh Said.⁴⁵ We know that Sheikh Said did not make any such claim even after he was sentenced to death by hanging and not even during his execution. Therefore, for this claim, we have only circumstantial

evidence and the fact that the revolt helped the Kemalists more than it did the Kurds. Nevertheless, I should make my position clearer on this subject. I do not claim that such a governmental plot did not exist; instead, I do point out that we lack “conclusive evidence” to prove it. Therefore, one should regard this conspiracy theory as plausible but a theory nonetheless.

D. A. Osborne, another British officer in the Foreign Office, informs us that even French authorities in Syria entertained the possibility that the revolt was “fictitious” or exaggerated. Osborne states, “We have seen in a telegram from Aleppo that the French authorities in Syria are inclined to regard the [Sheikh Said] rising as fictitious or largely exaggerated, which implies some ulterior purpose.”⁴⁶ Foreign observers seem to agree that the government in Ankara was trying to exaggerate the rebellion; however, the question lingering in their minds was, for what purpose?

In order to look further into the circumstantial evidence in the exploitation of the rebellion for political gain, we should turn our attention to political developments in Ankara. For example, a close examination of the timetable of the revolt can shed some valuable light on the issue under examination, that is, the silencing of the opposition, which was embodied by the PRP under the leadership of Kazım Karabekir, Rauf (Orbay), and Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), all one-time close associates of Mustafa Kemal.

When the rebellion broke out on February 13, as was mentioned, the government was headed by the moderate Fethi Bey (Okyar). After assessing the urgency of the rebellion based on telegrams he irregularly received (due to the rebels cutting off the telegram lines), on February 23 the government declared a state of emergency for one month in the “rebellion territories” (*isyan bölgesi*).⁴⁷ Fethi Bey was able to collect somewhat sufficient information to prepare his first report to the General Assembly of the TGNA 11 days after the breakout of the rebellion.⁴⁸ In his speech, Fethi Bey described the rebellion as local and explained his government’s policy in dealing with the rebels.⁴⁹ Ahmet Süreyya Bey (Örgeeveren), then a member of the TGNA and later a prosecutor of the Eastern Independence Tribunals that tried the Sheikh Said and his followers, is one of the most informative primary sources that deals with Ankara’s response to this rebellion. In his memoir, Süreyya Bey remembers that prior to Fethi Bey’s speech, Mustafa Kemal in private meetings showed a grave concern that the rebellion would spread nationwide (*memleketşümül bir durum ihdasına müsaid*).⁵⁰ Mustafa Kemal’s concern was also documented in another source.

Kazım (Özalp) Pasha, the president of the TGNA, informs us of a meeting that took place in his office. We do not know the exact date of this meeting, but it must have taken place before March 3, 1925, when Fethi Bey resigned as the prime minister. Present at this meeting were Fethi Bey, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, and Kazım Pasha, who, in his memoir, remembered this meeting as follows: "Mustafa Kemal asked Fethi Bey in my room what kind of preparations the government has been undertaking [regarding the rebellion]. Fethi Bey responded, 'Rebels and inciters will be sent to military courts (*Divan-ı Harb*).' Mustafa Kemal was not satisfied and stated that '*the real inciters are hiding in different parts of the country. Do you not think that the government needs to expand its area of investigation*' [emphasis added]. Fethi responded, 'If you like, I can resign.'" ⁵¹

Offering his resignation rather than complying with Mustafa Kemal's inquiry certainly suggests that Fethi Bey was not convinced of the president's argument. Then a striking question arises: Did Mustafa Kemal have better intelligence than that of the government on the rebellion, did he not share it with the government, or was he simply exaggerating? How is it possible that looking at the same data, Mustafa Kemal Pasha and Fethi Bey arrived at conclusions that were strikingly contradictory to each other? The Kemalist historiography tends to question the statesmanship of Fethi Bey in failing to immediately recognize the severity of the rebellion.⁵² It seems highly unlikely that Mustafa Kemal would be able to collect better intelligence in such a short time (less than 10 days) to warrant his caution.

It is possible that Mustafa Kemal regarded this rebellion as the commencement of a nationwide counterrevolution and was extremely suspicious about it. Yet it is equally possible that he wanted to benefit from this "timely" rebellion to silence his critics and needed to exaggerate it. Rıza Nur, a former minister of health and a one-time close associate and later opponent of Mustafa Kemal, echoed a view to which many of Mustafa Kemal's opponents subscribed when he described the rebellion as "God-sent" to eradicate the opposition.⁵³ Here it should be mentioned that we lack conclusive evidence to subscribe to either possibility. However, we may have again circumstantial evidence that suggests that the Kemalists intentionally overestimated the strength of the revolt. For example, the known scale and strength of the rebellion in the first weeks did not justify the vigilance that Mustafa Kemal demonstrated. Fethi Bey's report to the TGNA clearly indicated that the Ankara government was convinced of the locality of the revolt and confirmed the ability of the military

to crush it.⁵⁴ The U.S. consular reports also indicate that the Sheikh Said Revolt was not spreading.⁵⁵ In another report dated as late as April 8, 1925, the U.S. military attaché observes that “from a strictly military point of view, the revolt was never sufficiently widespread as to cause alarm, and the steady advance of the regulars [Turkish military], since the inception of their offensive, gives good reason to believe that order and tranquility will be restored in the near future except in certain mountainous regions.”⁵⁶ The statement that “the revolt was *never* sufficiently widespread as to cause alarm” is also consistent with the position adopted by Fethi Bey and contradicts the hard-line position of the İsmet Pasha government, which came to power on March 4, 1925. As mentioned above, the exaggeration of the rebellion was also an alternate view of some British military analysts. D. A. Osborne at the Foreign Office, for example, suggested that “once the revolt broke out its seriousness may have been exaggerated to enable [Mustafa] Kemal to reinstate İsmet [Inönü] as Prime Minister and to institute a variety of repressive measures against the rising tide of criticism and oppression.”⁵⁷ Osborne’s assessment seems to be a valid one. Indeed, İsmet Pasha became the prime minister one more time as a result of this revolt.

Regarding the reliability of foreign sources concerning the rebellion, I must state that both British and U.S. intelligence were watching the rebellion closely and sharing information. Although some of their information came from Turkish sources, they had their own intelligence as well. Confidential reports to London or Washington were intended for internal use, not for propagating a view. Nevertheless, I found the U.S. consular reports to Washington particularly reliable for two reasons. First, the United States, unlike Britain, was not a party to any ongoing conflict, such as the Mosul issue. Second, U.S. reports took the pain of grading the information they gathered on the basis of its reliability. In many instances, the U.S. high commissioner in Turkey relayed the information with a warning that reliability of the information could not be confirmed. For that reason, the U.S. consular reports, in some instances, are more reliable than those of British and Turkish sources. Nevertheless, the historian must consider the possibility that these sources contained unintentional misinformation.

In any event, on March 2, 1925, the RPP, the party in power, met in a closed meeting to reconsider its position on the government’s response to the rebellion. It was an extraordinary move since only several days before in a parliamentary session, Fethi Bey’s program in suppressing the rebellion was overwhelmingly endorsed.⁵⁸ In the

party meeting, Recep Bey (Peker), the spokesperson for the radical wing of the RPP, suggested that the government's response to the rebellion was inadequate and that harsh measures were necessary (*şiddet şarttır*).⁵⁹ Fethi Bey could not hide his astonishment at this move but responded,

I am surprised by Recep Bey's objection [to the government's handling of the revolt]. Because, we inherited this last rebellion, which was the continuation of the previous Nasturi rebellion . . . , from Recep Bey. He was then the Minister of the Interior. At that time, he did not take any [concerned] measure. Now what is the reason for him subscribing to violence and anger (*tehevviir*)?⁶⁰

To demonstrate the position of the PRP regarding the radicals' new move, an interesting newspaper article is noteworthy. Published on April 1, 1925, by the daily *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, an RPP organ, the article mentions a speech by Kazım Karabekir, the leader of the opposition party: "Kazım Karabekir Pasha's speech astonished us. According to the respectful General, the government knew that a rebellion was in the making. Yet it did not do anything to prevent it in order to use it possibly as a pretext to crush the opposition party."⁶¹

The article does not specify where and when Kazım Karabekir made such statements; however, there is no reason to doubt that such an accusation was leveled against the government. What is significant here is that Kazım Karabekir's accusation matches that of Fethi Bey. Clearly, Kazım Karabekir, like Fethi Bey, was implying that the previous İsmet Pasha government ignored the warnings. Kazım Karabekir went further to boldly suggest that the government's aim was to silence the opposition.

Based on Fethi Bey's and Kazım Karabekir's statements, can one suggest that the Sheikh Said Revolt was purposefully allowed to happen? It is very tempting to respond to this question positively. After all, the same accusation came from the members of two opposing parties. However, we cannot go any further than to point out that the accusations come from different credible sources, yet they fall short of providing any hard evidence. What we can safely state is the following: the radicals in the RPP wanted to topple Fethi Bey's government, and they were encouraged by Mustafa Kemal to increase their criticism of this moderate government.

At this point, it is important to note that there were attempts by Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Pasha to tame the İstanbul press and the newly formed PRP with the accusation that the latter had intentionally

incited reactionaries. Avni Doğan, a member of the TGNA, remembers a secret meeting requested by Mustafa Kemal in an RPP meeting. Doğan does not give us any specific date for this meeting but mentions that the next day the İsmet Pasha government resigned and that Fethi Bey formed the new government. He must have been referring to the date of October 21, 1924, for we know that İsmet Pasha resigned from his premiership on October 21 and that the next day Fethi Bey became the new prime minister. In this meeting, Mustafa Kemal shared his concern regarding the İstanbul press and the PRP—established *only three days* before this meeting on October 17, 1924. Mustafa Kemal began by stating,

I invited you here to decide on a significant issue. Negative incitements (*menfi tahrikat*) in the country have reached dangerous levels. Propagation by the İstanbul Press and the PRP encourages reactionaries who have been hiding here and there. . . . Available laws are far from protecting our reforms and new Republic. . . . Even in the most progressive democracies harsh measures were taken. We also need preventive measures to protect [our] reforms. Therefore, the prime Minister and I examined the situation. İsmet Pasha is of the opinion that we need some legislative measurements to support the executive branch and the police. What do you think?⁶²

Avni Doğan informs us that the majority in the meeting did not share Mustafa Kemal's pessimism and the proposed harsh legislative adjustments. On hearing this, Mustafa Kemal smiled and said,

I smell blood and gunpowder. I hope I am wrong. Fethi Bey thinks he can govern the country without such precaution. Today Prime Minister İsmet Pasha will resign and the new government will be formed by Fethi Bey. Keep our meeting a secret.⁶³

Considering that this meeting took place before the Sheikh Said Revolt, it is not difficult to suggest that Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Pasha were exploring the possibilities of silencing the opposition in the name of protecting the infant regime. This discussion provides us valuable evidence that the Sheikh Said Revolt was open to exploitation and manipulation and that motives did certainly exist.

Fethi Bey remained in power only two and a half months. On March 3, 1925, Fethi Bey gave his resignation to Mustafa Kemal, and consequently İsmet Pasha again was appointed as the new prime minister. The very next day, the *Takrir-i Sükun* passed the TGNA. Before

looking at the İsmet Pasha government's dealing with the revolt in the region and with the political opposition nationwide, a very significant but often overlooked detail needs to be examined. This examination will give us further clues about the intentions of Mustafa Kemal and his close associates to dominate the political landscape by muting the opposition.

We know that only one day before the voting took place in the TGNA for the previously mentioned law number 556, the prime minister, Fethi (Okyar) Bey, invited Kazım Karabekir (the chairman of the PRP), Rauf Bey, and Ali Fuat Pasha to a private meeting. During the meeting, Fethi Bey said, "I was charged with a duty to ask you to close down your party on your own. Otherwise, I see the future very dark. Much blood will be shed."⁶⁴ To this open threat, Kazım Karabekir replied, "On a legal ground we can form a political party; but closing it down is beyond our ability. You are in the government. You possess the power and the means [to close down our party]. If this is your wish, you can certainly accomplish it by yourself."⁶⁵ After hearing that Kazım Karabekir had no intentions of surrendering, Fethi Bey apologized, stating, "I am deeply sorry to come to you with such a demand. As you well know, I oppose all forced action (*örfi muamele*). [But] I am afraid that I will be in the minority."⁶⁶ Who did charge Fethi Bey, the prime minister, with such an improper mission? Ergün Aybars, a specialist on the Independence Tribunals, and Metin Toker, the son-in-law of İsmet Pasha, suggest that no one but Mustafa Kemal had the means to order Fethi Bey to carry the message.⁶⁷ On this subject, Aybars and Toker cannot be challenged. Fethi Bey was probably carrying Mustafa Kemal Pasha's note, which clearly indicated that the political opposition would not be tolerated. In any case, Ali Fuat Pasha, in his memoir, states that before the meeting concluded, Kazım Karabekir Pasha confirmed his party's support for the government in dealing with the rebellion.⁶⁸

Kazım Karabekir Pasha's refusal to comply with the "suggestion" of dissolving his party indicates that he must have been keenly aware of the intentions of the radical group in the RPP to take every measure to eliminate the political opposition. Yet the following events proved that neither Kazım Karabekir nor the other members of the PRP had any idea of the extremes the radicals were willing to go to establish their rule unchallenged. Aware that the radical faction in the RPP was undermining the moderate Fethi Bey government, the PRP decided to do all it could to keep Fethi Bey in power. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that the very next day, the PRP joined in the

RPP to pass law number 556, which banned the use of religion for political gains.⁶⁹ Ironically, although it was not this law that was utilized for the closing of the PRP several months later but rather the infamous *Takrir-i Sükun*, the use of religion for political gain was one of the major accusations leveled against the members of the PRP. We can now turn our attention to the *Takrir-i Sükun*, the law that was responsible for the silencing of the opposition.

TAKRİR-İ SÜKUN DISCUSSIONS IN PARLIAMENT⁷⁰

When Fethi Bey resigned as the prime minister, İsmet Pasha became the new premier and immediately introduced a new bill to the TGNA in its meeting on March 4, 1925, a bill that caused much controversy. This bill, number 1/638 and named as *Takrir-i Sükun*, played a decisive role in the future of the new republic. With its draconian content, the bill (later law number 589) became the most significant instrument that the radical Kemalists would use to silence the internal opposition by legitimizing its suppression.

In the session held on March 4, 1925, the new prime minister, İsmet Pasha, introduced this new bill to parliament as the following:

To the exalted Presidium and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Because of the necessity demonstrated by the recent extraordinary circumstances and events, in order to strengthen the power of the Turkish Republic and to safeguard the foundations of the revolution and in order to persecute and subject quickly the foolhardy ones who are harming and humiliating the innocent masses, through the adoption of the necessary measures against the reactionary and subversive actions and initiatives which may threaten the safety, law and order and social structures in the country, I request you to agree that this bill, which has been approved in the cabinet meeting of March the 4th, 1925, be submitted to the exalted Assembly for the approval and adoption.

The bill contained three articles:

Article 1

The government is empowered to prohibit on its own initiative and by administrative measure (subject to approval of the President) all organizations, provocations, exhortations, initiatives and publications which cause disturbance of the social

structures, law and order and safety and incite to reaction and subversion. The government can hand over the perpetrators of these acts to an Independence Tribunal.

Article 2

This law will be in force for a period of two years from the date of its promulgation.

Article 3

The cabinet is entrusted with the implementation of this law.⁷¹

Naturally, when it was discussed in parliament, the bill encountered staunch objection by the opposition members embodied by the PRP. After the *Takrir-i Sükun* was introduced in the TGNA, Gümüşhane representative Zeki Bey, a member of the opposition, objected to the bill on the grounds that it contradicted the Constitution (*Teşkilat-ı Esasiye*). Since the perpetrators could be sent to the Independence Tribunals, which could impose capital punishment without parliamentary approval, the opposition members were uneasy. "This bill violates the Constitution," suggested Zeki Bey. "The article 26 of the Constitution is quite clear. [It stipulates that] the TGNA is responsible for [the confirmation of] capital punishment. First, Article 26 of the Constitution needs to be amended, and then we should be able to deliberate on the [Takrir-i Sükun]." In response, Karesi representative Ahmet Süreyya Bey, who later became a prosecutor in the Independence Tribunals that were formed to enforce the *Takrir-i Sükun*, stated that this bill was already discussed in the Judicial Committee of the TGNA, which decided that it did not violate the constitution.

The opposition of Dersim representative Feridun Fikri Bey was more to the content of the bill. In his speech, Feridun Fikri objected to the bill on another ground, namely, that it would give extraordinary power to the government, which could potentially abuse this power by labeling people's ordinary political activities (*faaliyet-i beşeriye*) a danger for the security of the regime. "It is possible," maintained Feridun Fikri, "to provide security (*emniyet*), happiness (*huzur*) and order (*sükun*) which the motherland needs without [the *Takrir-i Sükun*]."

Drawing on this foundation, Kazım Karabekir, the chairperson of the opposition party, the PRP, presented his objection to the bill as the following:

Dear friends, as I indicated earlier from this very lectern, we [the PRP] have supported all the legal business of the government in

the region where this [Sheikh Said] incident occurred, and I repeat the pledge of our support. However, we do not support the process that put pressure on the natural [inalienable] rights of people in this particular incident. The bill that is now before you is not clear (*gayri vazih*) and elastic. If this bill becomes a law and if it attempts to limit the political structuring (*siyasi taazzuv*) to which our Constitution has given birth, and efforts to pressure the newspapers are intended, that would mean that the people's sovereignty will be abandoned. Because, this would mean that the voices of people's representatives will not [be heard]. Passing this bill is not an honor for the history of the Republic.

As for the Independence Tribunals, as its name suggests, these courts were established during our War of Independence. . . . If İsmet Pasha thinks that he can use these tribunals as a tool to tame [the opposition], he is gravely mistaken.

The fear of Kazım Karabekir was entirely justified, and in fact it was exactly what the government intended to do. This law would severely limit the PRP's political activities and hence its ability to constitute any opposition in parliament. However, they lacked the necessary political strength to stop the radicals, who constituted the majority. The Sheikh Said Revolt provided Mustafa Kemal and his supporters, namely, many members of the RPP, with an exceptional opportunity to silence the political opposition. To this end, not only the opposition in the TGNA but also the İstanbul press, which openly demonstrated distaste for Mustafa Kemal and the İsmet Pasha government, were the subject for the attention of the Takrir-i Sükun. It is not a misjudgment to suggest that the law's primary aim was not the handling of the Sheikh Said Revolt but rather the opposition. The law contributed very little to the success of the military action taken by the government against the revolt. Fethi Bey's statements in parliament on March 3, 1925, concerning his resignation from the office of the prime minister are noteworthy:

I understand that my colleagues do not consider the actions taken by my government concerning the rebellion adequate, and advocate for broader and stronger measures. I am of the opinion that all necessary measures required by the rebellion are in place and these measures are sufficient to suppress the rebellion. I do not want the responsibility for shedding much

blood by promoting stronger measurements. Therefore, I resign from my post.⁷²

Until the Sheikh Said Revolt, the radicals felt threatened by the publications of İstanbul newspapers and saw them as a major obstacle in the process of implementing the pending reforms. Although this fear certainly had merits, it should not escape scrutiny. We know, for example, that some journalists' opposition centered not around the reforms that Mustafa Kemal intended to implement but around Mustafa Kemal himself. Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın) and to some degree Ahmet Emin (Yalman), for example, were implying in their columns that Mustafa Kemal was becoming increasingly despotic. These Western-educated intellectuals did not share the aspirations of the Islamic segments of society and their leaders. They shared the vision of westernization as Mustafa Kemal did. However, bold disregard of the fundamentals of a democratic regime was the core of their opposition to Mustafa Kemal. We return to the issue of the journalists later.

At this point, we should turn our attention back to the discussions in parliament to see how the government also targeted the İstanbul press. Fearing the potential that the İstanbul press possessed to create or perhaps solidify the reaction to the Kemalist administration, Mustafa Kemal had a meeting with the journalists in İzmit (January 16–17, 1923).⁷³ However, this meeting did not prove to be very productive in terms of controlling the pens of the İstanbul journalists. While debating on the *Takrir-i Sükun* bill on March 4, 1925, minister of defense Recep Bey accused the İstanbul press of challenging the authority of the TGNA, a charge that was punishable even under the Law on the High Treason:

The most significant point that needs to be addressed [here] is the İstanbul Press, which is the main reason for the present day weakness [of our state]. . . . Of course, there are exceptions. . . . [The İstanbul press] has attacked the TGNA, all of its political institutions, and members with vicious lies and manipulations. . . . Every morning, [it] manipulated the people with [innuendo] that the [Ankara] government . . . does not deserve credibility and trust (*itibar*). . . . In order to provide security for the general public (*emniyet-i umumiye*), for the law (*emniyet-i hukukiye*) and for the nation (*emniyet-i milliye*), and in order to establish a government powerful enough to destroy these poison centers (*zehir yuvaları*), it is the duty of this parliament to pass this law.

With these statements, Recep Bey presented the position of the İsmet (İnönü) government in reference to the İstanbul press. The revolt was a great chance for the hard-core radicals to settle old scores with the İstanbul newspapers that were not very friendly—to say the least—to some in the Kemalist circles.

Although memoirs describing the Sheikh Said Revolt deemed it a significant one and criticized Fethi Bey for not being vigorous enough to undertake the necessary measures, during the Takrir-i Sükun deliberations in the TGNA, speakers in favor of the bill did not make any case for the severity of the rebellion.⁷⁴ The radicals framed their argument for the necessity of the Takrir-i Sükun, suggesting that this revolt was the tip of the iceberg. The real problem, as they suggested, was the unknown inciters of the rebellion, as they hid in many segments of society. İsmet Pasha, responding to Kazım Karabekir's accusations of abusing the authority of the Independence Tribunals, stated that the tribunals were only tools to provide the nation with security and order. However, in response to Rauf Bey's assertion that stated, "I do not see the Republic in danger. Therefore, such a [drastic] law is not necessary," İsmet Pasha was polemical. After confirming that the regime was safe, İsmet Pasha rhetorically asked, "Can a Republic [like ours], which recognizes the dangers and takes necessary measures, be in danger?" This answer did not really respond to the question posed by Rauf, whose question intended to ask whether the government considered the revolt an imminent threat to the state. In the parliamentary discussions, İsmet Pasha did not speak to the specific danger that the Sheikh Said Revolt posed but instead chose to present the issue as a general security concern that was instigated by unnamed individuals and groups hiding outside the rebellion area. However, there was little doubt in parliament that the real target was the political opposition. For that reason, the discussions on the sixty-ninth parliamentary session, dated March 4, 1925, focused on how this law would affect the general individual liberties in the country, not on how this law would help suppress the rebellion.

In fact, almost exactly two years later, İsmet Pasha clearly stated that the real danger was not the Sheikh Said Revolt; it was the general confusion and degenerate intellectuals (*mütereddi müneverler*).⁷⁵ These people were hiding within the general population as journalists and politicians who needed to be weeded out. Thus, while in appearance this law was serving a noble cause, in reality the Takrir-i Sükun conferred an extraordinary power on the government to monopolize the definition of these "degenerate intellectuals" and the newspapers

and political parties in which they hid themselves. As is shown below, in general it was the oppositional press (mainly in İstanbul) and the PRP as the main opposition in parliament that were targeted.

In any case, the bill became law number 589 on March 4, 1925, with 122 “yes” and 22 “nay” votes, which were cast by all PRP members present at the voting. The PRP did not muster enough votes to block the *Takrir-i Sükun*. After this vote, in the same session, İsmet Pasha requested the formation of two Independence Tribunals, one in Ankara and one in the region where the military operations were taking place (*harekat-ı askeriye muntakası*). What is most consequential about this development is that while the Ankara tribunal still needed parliament’s approval to carry out capital punishment, the other tribunal—based mainly in Diyarbakır—did not need such an approval.⁷⁶ Judgments of the latter would be final and carried out immediately.⁷⁷ This tribunal was going to judge cases that were related to the rebellion and that took place within the defined region where the rebellion took place. The Ankara tribunal was assigned to deal with cases that were outside the jurisdiction of the Eastern Independence Tribunal. As will be seen below, in practice, the Eastern Tribunal was involved in cases that were technically beyond its jurisdiction.⁷⁸

Another significant development that sealed the fortune of the PRP was the election of the members of the Independence Tribunals. The election took place on March 7, 1925. Expectedly, the members elected for these tribunals were close associates of Mustafa Kemal, and many belonged to the most radical wing of the RPP.⁷⁹

THE TAKRİR-İ SÜKUN AND THE CASE OF THE JOURNALISTS

On March 6, 1925, only two days after the passing of the *Takrir-i Sükun*, the government closed down the following newspapers: *Tevhid-i Efkâr*, *İstiklal*, *Son Telgraf*, *Orak Çekiç*, and *Sebilürreşat*. A month later, *Tanin*, whose editor in chief was Hüseyin Cahit Bey, joined the list.⁸⁰ Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın) was a well-known CUP member and an ardent critic of the Ankara government. On August 11, 1925, *Vatan*, whose editor in chief was Ahmet Emin (Yalman), also joined the list. Some other newspapers that were closed down during the period of the *Takrir-i Sükun* also included *Yoldaş*, *Presse du Soir*, *Resimli Ay*, *Millet*, *Sada-yı Hak*, *Doğru Söz*, *Kahkaha*, *Tok Söz*, *İstikbal*, and *Sayha*.⁸¹ Only *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (Ankara) and *Cumhuriyet* (İstanbul), both organs of the government, circulated freely as major newspapers.

It is interesting that *Tanin*, the CUP organ, was closed down not immediately but rather a month after the first round of paper closings. This may indicate that the radicals were still not sure how to deal with the CUP members. Many CUP members were already in the RPP,⁸² so it is possible that the delay was intended to measure the reaction of CUP members within as well as outside the RPP. The government must have become more confident in controlling the possible reaction that on April 15, 1925, *Tanin* was also closed down. The pretext for this decision was a frivolous one: that the paper used the word “raid” (*baskın*) to describe the closing of the PRP’s İstanbul headquarter and branches.⁸³ The İsmet Pasha government, based on Takrir-i Sükun, charged that this word could be considered inflammatory and hence could endanger public safety. In the end, no substantial protest materialized to the targeting of the CUP organ. Nevertheless, the radicals were still uneasy in dealing with the other CUP members and suspicious of their political activities at least until 1926, when the major CUP leaders were executed in their alleged connection to the İzmir assassination attempt of Mustafa Kemal.⁸⁴

Not all closed newspapers were published in İstanbul and hence were members of the so-called İstanbul press. In fact, this roster was highly eclectic and included not only Islamist and other oppositional newspapers that were critical of the government and hence the main target of the law but also the communist newspapers. Ironically, the communist newspapers were highly critical of the Sheikh Said Revolt from the beginning, considering it a manifestation of backwardness in the East. They supported the government’s harsh standing against these revolts. The *Orak Çekiç* particularly was very complimentary to the government.⁸⁵ Erik Jan Zürcher correctly observes that “the first to be prosecuted by the new Ankara Independence Tribunal were not the PRP members, but the leftists.” Thirty-eight socialists and communists were arrested and sent to Ankara with the charge of “propagating for communist organizations and hence endangering the public safety and attempting to change the regime.”⁸⁶ This is a clear signal that any political and intellectual movement that was not in line with that of the radicals would be branded as dangerous to public safety.

For example, on May 27, 1925, Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), the editor of *Tanin*, was sentenced to a life-term banishment in Çorum, a small town in Anatolia, for the word “raid” that the newspaper used in his article.⁸⁷ It was during this trial that Hüseyin Cahit uttered his famous line describing the Independence Tribunals: “I would much prefer to

be a defendant in such a court than a member of it."⁸⁸ In addition, Cevat Şakir (Kabağağaçlı—later known as “Halikarnas Balıkçısı”) and Zekeriya (Sertel) were sentenced to three years in exile in Bodrum. The cause for this sentencing was an article by Cevat Şakir in *Resimli Ay* on April 23, 1923, titled “Hapishanede İdama Mahkum Olanlar Bile Bile Asılmaya Nasıl Giderler?” (How do those condemned to death go to their execution knowingly?). In this article, the author⁸⁹ claimed that the deserters in the military were executed without due process. The article angered the government, and the Ankara tribunal handed out the previously mentioned verdict to Cevat Şakir, the author, as well as Zekeriya Bey, the editor of the journal *Resimli Ay*.⁹⁰ The Ankara Independence Tribunal also condemned Ata Çelebi, the editor of *Doğru Söz* in Mersin, to one year in prison.

The issue of the journalists who were sent to the Eastern Independence Tribunal (Şark İstiklal Mahkemesi) is in fact more telling. Available information concerning their trial in Diyarbakır and later in Elazığ shows that the government wished to silence the opposition press and by doing so to set an example for the newspapers, which were not entirely controlled by the government. On June 7, 1925, Süreyya Bey, the prosecutor, requested the arrest of some journalists and stated the reason for the prosecution of these journalists as the following:

There are several reasons for [the Sheikh Said] rebellion. Among these is the attitude of the journalists whose publications, knowingly or not, influenced the rebellion and who manipulated “the freedom of the press” for political and personal gains. For this reason, the issues of the [related] newspapers should be brought to [the court for examination] and the journalists whose essays are believed to influence the rebellion must be brought to justice.⁹¹

Süreyya Bey’s request for the arrest of the journalists was based on Sheikh Said’s interrogation in which the sheikh stated that “the articles in the newspaper *Sebilürreşat* would increase our anger for the government and encourage us [for such a rebellion].”⁹² We will see below that these accusations leveled against the journalists may have been a result of false promises to Sheikh Said.

Nevertheless, on June 22, 1925, Velit Ebuziya of *Tevhid-i Efkâr*; Sadri Ethem (Ertem), Fevzi Lütfi (Karaosmanoğlu), and İlhami Safa of *Son Telgraf*; Abdülkadir Kemali (Öğütçü) of *Toksöz*; and Eşref Edip of *Sebilürreşat* were arrested and sent to Ankara and later Diyarbakır. Other

journalists who were named as defendants in this case included Gündüz Nadir, Ahmet Şükrü (Esmer), Suphi Nuri (İleri), İsmail Müştak (Mayakon), and Ahmet Emin (Yalman).

Ahmet Emin, in his memoir, states that his paper *Vatan* was the only newspaper in İstanbul that was not closed down until August 1925 thanks to the support of Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Pasha. However, when the government asked Ahmet Emin to publish an essay to defend the government's decision of the closing of the PRP, he refused to comply.⁹³ Consequently, *Vatan* was shut down, and Ahmet Emin was sent to Diyarbakır with an obscure charge that "the newspaper caused the rebellion by undermining the authority of the government."⁹⁴

The memoir of Avni Doğan, the acting prosecutor for this case since Süreyya Bey was in Ankara, is revealing. He claims that the journalists were tried over the objections of the prosecutor Süreyya Bey (Örgeveren), who stated that there is no legal ground for such prosecution.⁹⁵ Furthermore, it is in his memoir that Avni Doğan discloses an impressively honest observation regarding the case for the journalists. This information is especially significant, for it comes from the very prosecutor of the trial:

In our private meetings [as the members of the tribunal], the conversations always ended up with the necessity of punishing the journalists. The other members repeatedly pressured me with the questions as to how I would construct the case for the prosecution and what I think about how to proceed to prosecute the journalists. I was hesitant to reveal my real thoughts on this matter, because after thoroughly investigating the matter, I learned the reason why Sheikh Said mentioned the names of these journalists in his interrogation. Sheikh Said's accusations [that he was encouraged by the articles of some of these journalists] were not his own. These names were given to him and he was pressured to accuse these journalists in exchange for a lighter sentence. [Furthermore,] every day I received coded messages from Ankara, from the second tier officials. In these messages, I was encouraged to prosecute them to the fullest extent, for they took position against the government since the proclamation of the Republic. [These messages also suggested that] their punishment would gain me credibility and influence.⁹⁶

Therefore, we are informed by one of the most authoritative sources concerning this case that the journalists' prosecution was a set up by the government. This information was corroborated by another memoir by

Eşref Edip, one of the prosecuted journalists, who recorded that when he was en route to Diyarbakır, he spent a night in a prison in Urfa. There he met several Kurds who were exiled to Western Anatolia by the same tribunal. These Kurds, who were probably jailed with Sheikh Said or at least had contact with him in jail, informed Eşref Edip that Ali Saip, a member of the court, gave Sheikh Said the impression that if he involved the journalists in this rebellion, his life would be spared. Therefore, "until the last moment, Sheikh Said was under the impression that he would be exiled to Edirne."⁹⁷ This was also evident by Sheikh Said's statements just before his execution: "Ali Saip Bey, you were going to save me if I told the truth (?)"⁹⁸ It is quite possible that Sheikh Said was referring to such a secret agreement.

Similar abnormalities regarding the function of the tribunal can also be found in the memoir of the main prosecutor, Süreyya Bey. In his *Şeyh Said İsyanı ve Şark İstiklal Mahkemesi*, Süreyya Bey remembers Ali Saip Bey's reaction to his position that the tribunal should not be involved in crimes that were not specified in the law for the formation of the Independence Tribunals. Upset, Ali Saip Bey asked,

Süreyya Bey! You are of the opinion that our court cannot get involved in any crimes that were not specified in the law for the Independence Tribunals. Look at the newspapers. The Ankara Independence Tribunal also deals with all other crimes that relate to military or other laws. How can you explain this?⁹⁹

It was obvious that Ali Saip Bey and the other members of the court wanted to have greater jurisdiction in choosing what cases to prosecute and that Süreyya Bey was hesitant to prosecute them. At one point, Ali Saip Bey bluntly asked, "If the court decides to prosecute [some other crimes], would you object to it?" Süreyya Bey's response was equally blunt: "Of course, I would."¹⁰⁰ In a countermove, Ali Saip and Lütfi Fikri threatened Süreyya in a thinly veiled fashion that the court should inform Ankara of Süreyya Bey's lack of cooperation. "Please listen to me," Süreyya retorted. "Let me repeat briefly. The jurisdiction of our court is clearly determined by the law. We cannot disregard it. But if you [the other members of the court] wish to do so, I will not interfere or try to stop you. I will simply use my right to object as the prosecutor."¹⁰¹ This time, the chief judge, Mazhar Müfit Bey, got involved and reminded him, "But sir, there is also a law called the *Takrir-i Sükun*." It was clear to Süreyya Bey that he was isolated in the court. The next day, when Süreyya Bey tried to reason with Lütfi Müfit Bey, a member of the court, he heard a statement that summed

up the mind-set of those who promoted the idea of the Independence Tribunals: "We have a certain objective" stated Lütü Müfit Bey, "*in order to achieve it, we sometimes rise above the law*" [emphasis added]. This was an extraordinary admission that also confirmed Avni Doğan's previously mentioned experience concerning Ankara's pressure. The memoirs of Avni Doğan and Süreyya Örgüeveren certainly confirm that the tribunals were the tools of the government in its attempt to silence the opposition. The telegrams that Süreyya Bey received from Recep Bey and İsmet Pasha, the minister of defense and the prime minister, respectively, pressured Süreyya to cooperate with the other members of the court.¹⁰² Süreyya Bey indicates that as a result of these pressures by Ankara, he gave in, and the Eastern Independence Tribunal prosecuted any crimes it wished.

There should be no doubt that the Independence Tribunals were guided by the radicals in Ankara. Eşref Edip, the editor of the Islamist daily *Sebilürreşat*, goes further to claim that Ali Saip Bey was the point man for the secret directives the court received from Ankara. Eşref Edip informs us that the accused journalists followed Ali Saip's position very closely, for he received special coded messages from Ankara. Therefore, his opinion was basically Ankara's opinion, and that was what counted. In his memoir, Eşref Edip states,

Other than the official Tribunal account for messages from Ankara, there was a personal account for Ali Saip. The secret directives were sent to this account. . . . We would learn about the content the official correspondence between the court and Ankara through the clerks. But it was impossible to know what the secret directives to Ali Saip Bey contained. Therefore, we would watch him closely, for his opinions were basically those of Ankara.¹⁰³

The event that is known in Turkish republican history as the "*Gazeteciler Davası*," or "the Trial of the Journalists," was only the first step in the elimination of any opposition to the radicals. After many fearful and agonizing months, a coded message from Ankara signaled that they would be released. The message asked the court to encourage the journalists to write a letter of forgiveness to Mustafa Kemal, and they would be forgiven by the president.¹⁰⁴ The journalists wrote the following letter:

To President Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara

In these days that our case is being tried in the Eastern Independence Tribunal, we regard bringing ourselves to your exalted attention a divine blessing. With the hope that we have proven

ourselves as loyal followers of the Republic and sincere servants of the reforms, we with a sense of endless pride, once again confirm to your highness that although our conviction of innocence calms our hearts, at this moment we trust even more the gracious forgiveness of your noble heart. Henceforth, in order to continue our mission with a sincere spiritual tie, to advance towards our high goal by making the spiritual connection that we feel [for you] as the guide to our future actions, we [beg] that you do not spare the favor of your trust in us.

We submit to you, the Great Savior, our deepest respect with the hope that our innocence that has been already demonstrated in the presence of the court will be supported by the good news of your forgiveness and leniency, which are very valuable for us, and which we hope to hear from the exalted conscience of you.¹⁰⁵

In replying to this request, Mustafa Kemal sent a short telegram:

To the Prosecution of Eastern Independence Tribunal:

I have previously submitted to the attention of the court telegrams of the journalists, admitting mistakes in their [crimes] that have been observed (*meşhudat*) in Anatolia and in the rebellion territories and showing their remorse. This time, again, they apply with the abovementioned telegram. It is appropriate to take this telegram also to merciful consideration, sir.¹⁰⁶

As a result, on September 13, 1925, the acting prosecutor Avni Doğan requested from the court that the case be dismissed on the grounds that articles published in their respected newspapers, although it was “proven” that these articles facilitated the rebellion, did not have intent. As such, the journalists could be tried not for high treason but rather for the crimes under the Press Law. Since Article 32 of the Press Law does not allow courts to try a case more than three months old, the journalists needed to be dismissed.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the court did not clear them from the accusations that they incited the rebellion but released them based on technicality.

Moreover, the telegrams to and from Ankara clearly demonstrate Ankara’s influence on the tribunal and in the end its willingness to set them free. However, they raise several significant questions as well. For example, based on Eşref Edip’s memoir, we do know under which circumstances this telegram was prepared. The request of writing such a telegram came not from the journalists but from Ankara.¹⁰⁸ Why did the radicals in Ankara find it necessary to request such a

letter? One possible explanation comes from Velid Ebüzziya, who originally objected signing a telegram requesting forgiveness. Velid Ebüzziya was the editor of *Tevhid-i Efkar* and was upset by the request that such a telegram would mean admitting the guilt for a crime he did not commit. His explanation for Ankara's request for such a telegram was the following. By receiving such a request from the accused, the court wished to justify the unlawful imprisonment of the journalists and protect itself from the outcome of such tyranny.

One may justifiably suggest that such a fear was the last thing the radicals had, for, as revolutionaries, their lives were on the line regardless. However, it should be remembered that in 1925, the radicals were not entirely in control of the political process, and, however weak, there was still a political opposition in parliament. Such a telegram would silence their criticism and would justify, at least on paper, the action of the tribunal. The existence of such a written apology would discredit the journalists, who were hostile to the government, and would ensure their silence. Yet their execution would do more harm to the credibility of the government.

Another possible but more cynical explanation can be that, short of executing the journalists, the radicals and Mustafa Kemal wanted to humiliate them in the eyes of the public for their anti-Kemalist standing. Without a doubt, the journalists could have been given the same verdict without a pleading telegram to Ankara since the primary goal of intimidating them about their future political actions was clearly and completely achieved. However, some radicals, such as Recep Peker and Ali Saip, may have wanted to settle personal scores with the journalists.

The text of the telegram contains more of a begging tone than that of an apology or an admittance of guilt. This indicates that the journalists were very careful in crafting the text and in convincing Velid Ebüzziya. Thus, the trial of the journalists ended. From that point on, the acquitted journalists sought ways to build bridges with the Kemalists and did not publish any oppositional articles.

THE CLOSING OF THE PRP

Mustafa Kemal was not favorably disposed to the formation of the new party, fearing mainly that such a division would encourage the opponents of the emerging and fragile regime. There were also some radicals in the government who did not like any criticism and were threatened

by the high prestige and outstanding reputation of some members of the PRP leadership (such as Rauf Orbay, General Ali Fuat Cebesoy, and General Kazım Karabekir) among the populace. A U.S. consular report sent by Admiral Mark L. Bristol, the U.S. high commissioner, to the U.S. secretary of state evinces this point. In this particular dispatch, Mark Bristol included his "War Diary," which informed Washington about his trip to Ankara to meet Turkish ministers and also Prime Minister İsmet Pasha. The entry dated April 25, 1925, gives a transcript of the conversation that took place between İsmet Pasha and Admiral Bristol as interpreted by Howland Shaw, a member of the U.S. consulate. This meeting took place at İsmet Pasha's residence in Ankara and lasted one hour, during which time Bristol brought up the issue of political opposition. Following is the translation of this conversation by Shaw:

The conversation then drifted to the difficulties of political life, especially the difficulty of handling a parliament. The Admiral asked İsmet Pasha point blank what he thought of a two-party system. İsmet Pasha replied that two parties were clearly desirable. He made this statement; however, it seemed to me, with very little conviction. The Admiral pointed out that the advantage of having two parties was that the various questions brought up in parliament were looked at and discussed from several points of view. İsmet Pasha admitted the truth of this. He asked how many members of Congress we had in America. The Admiral replied that we had some 420. İsmet Pasha expressed the greatest horror at this and was inclined to sympathize with the United States Government, even more when learned that besides 420 Congressmen we had a number of Senators. Apparently İsmet Pasha felt that 288 Deputies was more than sufficient as a source of trouble. He said that an opposition in a parliament was quite all right, but not an opposition which was opposed to the Constitution and to the foundation of the society.¹⁰⁹

Bristol and his translator Shaw described the meeting as cordial and frank but seem to have been surprised at İsmet Pasha's remark about deputies in the Turkish Assembly being a source of trouble. It was in this meeting that Bristol received firsthand information regarding the government's unfavorable attitude toward the opposition party in Turkey. It is noteworthy that the conversation took place two months before the closing of the PRP offices nationwide.

The legal political opposition was no doubt a source of anxiety for the RPP, for the PRP recruited very prestigious leaders into its ranks. Hence, it is fair to say that without the charisma of Mustafa Kemal, the RPP in all likelihood would not have been able to enjoy any popular majority in parliament. The possibility was not too remote that had the PRP continued to attract former CUP members in particular, it could have been a major contender for power. However, among the rank-and-file members of the two parties, personal enmities were very visible, as demonstrated by the number of accusations leveled by RPP members against PRP members. According to Ahmet Yeşil, the author of a comprehensive study on the PRP, there were three commonalities in the accusations leveled against the PRP. The first is the fact that all accusations included complaints that the new party was manipulating religion for the purpose of gaining political power and registering members based on the claim that their party respected religion while the government party did not; second, that all accusers came from the ranks of the RPP; and, third, that accusers had preexisting enmities against the accused inside or outside the political arena.¹¹⁰

By the same token, we do know that some leaders of the PRP harbored envy against Mustafa Kemal and his close associates. The U.S. archives house documents that demonstrate this point. For example, the "War Diary" of Bristol has an entry dated October 25, 1923, dealing with the status of the caliph in relation to the president. As is known, the sultanate was separated from the caliphate in 1922, and the former was abolished. The Ankara government elected Abdülmecid Efendi as the new caliph. However, between 1922 and 1924, the legal and political status of the new caliph in relation to the president of the republic was a source of confusion, particularly for the diplomats in İstanbul. On this subject, Bristol recorded in his diary a conversation between a certain Mr. Scotten, a member of the U.S. diplomatic mission under Bristol, and Refet Pasha, who was the representative of the Ankara government in İstanbul but later became a member of the opposition:

I [Mr. Scotten] tried to ascertain Refet's view as to the relative rank of the Calif and the "head of the State." I stated that it was conceivable, for instance, that a ship of war might be in Constantinople when the head of the State arrived and it would be necessary to fire a salute both to him and to the Calif, and I asked him what he conceived to be the proper salute to be rendered to each one. He laughed uproariously, and stated, "Fire as many guns as you wish for that spiritual gentleman up there in the palace at

Dolma Baghche. Give him all the honors you choose, but don't salute the head of the State at all. Leave that poor fellow alone." He said, "He is simply a man who is unhappy enough to have fallen into a disagreeable job and who in a few years may have to be riding on a tram car again."¹¹¹

This conversation demonstrates that a certain level of confusion about the relative rank of the caliph existed. It is also possible that the question was geared toward understanding Ankara's attitude toward the caliph. However, this piece of information is even more significant for scholars whose research concerns the personal rivalries among the ruling elite in Turkey. We know that Refet Pasha, one of the leaders of the Turkish War of Independence, joined the ranks of the opposition party (PRP) in 1924. This information clearly demonstrates that even before the formation of the PRP, there was a certain level of jealousy. In fact, Mr. Scotten and Admiral Bristol specifically noted in the same entry that Refet Pasha came across in the interview as very envious of Mustafa Kemal.

This level of personal rivalry and struggle for power may be understandable during a period in which the power vacuum was not entirely filled. However, with Mustafa Kemal's solid support of the RPP, the playing ground was certainly not even, and the PRP was very vulnerable to government sanctions. Moreover, the closing of the opposition party did clearly contradict Mustafa Kemal's expressed desire for democracy. Although there were earlier indications that the government wanted to silence the political opposition by intimidation, such as the previously mentioned request of Prime Minister Fethi Bey from Kazım Karabekir for the PRP to dissolve itself on February 25, 1925, it was, as mentioned repeatedly, the Sheikh Said Revolt that provided the government with a pretext for silencing the political and intellectual opposition.

Complaints about the PRP members and their political activities were finding their way into the TGNA soon after it was formed. A complaint mentioned in a document dated February 1, 1925, claimed that the PRP recruiters signed up new members by asking the question, "Do you prefer the sultan or Mustafa Kemal?"¹¹² The rivals of the PRP soon realized that the most effective complaint was the use of religion in the political arena, as the party program of the PRP included an article (Article 6) confirming its respect for religion. Accordingly, a great many complaints came after the *Takrir-i Sükun* Law was passed on March 4, 1925. In the TGNA archives, as Ahmet Yeşil informs us,

there exist 68 different documents and one notebook of court proceedings against several PRP members.¹¹³ The court proceedings include 14 sessions about complaints against the PRP. As a result of the investigation of these complaints, the Ankara Independence Tribunal, which was formed on March 7, 1925,¹¹⁴ decided to confiscate all documents in possession of the PRP's İstanbul headquarters and other İstanbul branches on April 11, 1925. The tribunal was also interested in examining the documents related to the accounting of the PRP and ordered that all branches and headquarters be entered simultaneously.¹¹⁵ Two large sacks of documents were confiscated by the police and sent to Ankara on April 13, 1925. Ahmet Yeşil has mentioned that the PRP's former Beykoz branch director, Hüseyin Bey; the branch secretary, Hayri Bey; and Nuri Bey were taken into custody and sent to Ankara for questioning on the same day.¹¹⁶ There were other members of the PRP—such as Salih Paşo and Kamil Efendi—who were accused of using religious propaganda for political gain.

The verdict of the Ankara tribunal—after examining the documents and questioning the accused—was that the crime of religious propaganda in politics did take place. Accordingly, the court sentenced the accused to imprisonment, ranging from life sentences to one-year terms. One accused, Resul Hoca, was exiled to Ayaş, a small town in Anatolia.¹¹⁷ It is important to note, however, that the tribunal did not limit itself to individuals committing the crime. It decided to “warn” the government about the PRP's activities. In other words, the PRP became entirely responsible for the actions of every single registered member. This was certainly a heavy burden for the PRP, as it was impossible to control every member of the party.

The major blow to the PRP did not come from the Ankara tribunal but the Eastern (Diyarbakır) Independence Tribunal. While the proceedings of the Ankara tribunal continued, a similar case was brought before the Eastern Independence Tribunal. Mehmet Fethi Bey, the Urfa-Siverek representative of the PRP, was accused of manipulating religion for political gain. The case was significant, for it resulted in the closing down of the PRP branches in Eastern Anatolia on May 25, 1925. Correspondingly, eight days later, on June 3, 1925, the government, based on the *Takrir-i Sükun*, ordered the closing down (*sedd*) of all branches of the PRP. It is noteworthy that technically the party was not dissolved, but all its offices were closed. The PRP members continued to vote as a bloc in parliament. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, this was the beginning of the single-party era, which lasted until 1946. The PRP was not allowed to reopen.

Was the closure of the PRP justified? A quick glance at Fethi Bey's case before the Eastern Independence Tribunal may raise doubts about the impartiality of the verdict. For that reason, let us first look more closely at the case. The most useful primary source in this context consists of the proceedings that can be found in the TGNA archives.¹¹⁸ The official records of the case indicate that those who accused Fethi Bey came from the ranks of the opposition party, the RPP.¹¹⁹ Ahmet Yeşil has drawn attention to the fact that the accusers used the exact same sentences and failed to bring any witnesses to the stand but each other. The accusers' identical sentences, claimed to be uttered by Fethi Bey, were the following: "They [the government] shut the madrasas down. They did away with the Shari'a. We [the PRP] want the Shari'a of the Prophet (*Şeriat-ı Muhammediye*). Our party will advance the religion [Islam]. Let's work together."¹²⁰

These statements certainly fell into the category of treason and were punishable under the High Treason Law and the *Takrir-i Sükun*. Based on the previously mentioned accusation, Fethi Bey appeared before the tribunal on April 30, 1925. His trial was rather swift and lasted only three sessions (on April 30, May 12, and May 18, 1925). Fethi Bey denied all accusations of having manipulated religion and instead accused Mehmet Emin Bey, the director of the Urfa/Siverek branch of the RPP and the mayor of the town, of manufacturing such baseless rumors to harm the PRP.¹²¹ Next, the prosecutor, Süreyya Bey, asked questions about Article 6 of the PRP's party program, which stated that "the party respects religion." The prosecutor wanted to know whether Fethi Bey ever considered this article being the culprit for the public's thinking of the PRP as a religious party. The implication was simple: the PRP had included this article about religion in its program in the hope that it would attract more conservative-minded people. This may be the case; however, Article 6 itself did not constitute a crime. In fact, the party had been formed with this program in November 1924 with the permission of the government. The only crime would have been the abuse of the article for political gains. Aware of this, Fethi Bey's response was more political: "It is the responsibility of the TGNA to judge the legality of our 6th article. For this reason, I never referred to this article in my political activities."¹²² In other words, Fethi Bey denied the charge that he had manipulated religion.

Other than the accounts of the accusers belonging to the rival party, as mentioned above, the prosecutor also utilized the statements of Sheikh Eyüp, the director of the Siverek branch of Fethi Bey's own

party. In his accounts, Sheikh Eyüp stated that Fethi Bey stayed in his house for 15 days when they were trying to form the Siverek branch. Sheikh Eyüp added that Fethi Bey “was trying to establish the PRP branch here and was recruiting members. He was indicating that Mustafa Kemal gave permission for this, and their party has respect for religion. The other party [RPP] does not comply with religion that much. He said this openly.”¹²³

Ahmet Yeşil has speculated that such an accusation could be the result of possible false promises made to him.¹²⁴ However, we do not have any record of such a deal, except that such a possibility did exist. Fethi Bey categorically denied the charge but was not able to escape the verdict that found him guilty as charged. He was sentenced to five years in prison in Sinop. Because of his previous good standing as a citizen and his service to the nation, the sentence was reduced to three years.

The verdicts of the Ankara Independence Tribunal on May 3, 1925,¹²⁵ as well as of the Eastern (Diyarbakır) Independence Tribunal on May 19, 1925,¹²⁶ resulted in a government (cabinet) decree on June 3, 1925, to close down all offices of the PRP nationwide.¹²⁷ The decree was signed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (the president), İsmet Pasha (the prime minister), and six other ministers of the government.¹²⁸ According to the decree,

During the [prosecutions] and trials concerning a number of provocations taking place before the Independence Tribunal of Ankara, it has been established that a number of persons holding official functions within the Progressive Republican Party in the İstanbul area have used the principle of respect for religious opinions and beliefs, included in the party’s program, as a means to deceive public opinion and to stimulate religious incitement, and the decision of the tribunal, to the effect that it has been decided to draw the government’s attention to the current attitude of the party, has been laid before the government by the public prosecutor’s office.

During the [prosecutions] and trials of the Independence Tribunal of Diyarbakır it has been established that official representatives of the Progressive Republican Party have used the principle of respect for religious ideas and beliefs, included in the party program, as a means to gain support for the propaganda of reactionaries who pretend to save the country from atheists and that this has led to many serious incidents during the manifestations of the

latest [Sheikh Said] insurrection. . . . Under these circumstances, it is impossible to allow a movement aimed at the use of religion for political purposes to exist.¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have tried to examine several questions. The first and most consequential question concerned the relationship between the Sheikh Said Revolt and the radical Kemalists. Although foreign observers—American, French, and British—entertained the possibility and even suggested that the Ankara government fomented the rebellion, this view was not uniformly accepted. These sources base their claim on circumstantial evidence that the Sheikh Said Revolt benefited the Kemalists more than the Kurds or the British. Circumstantial evidence by its very nature is not conclusive; however, it is not necessarily false.

We have more convincing evidence to support the claim that the Sheikh Said Revolt was manipulated by way of exaggerating its possible overall effects in the country. It is well documented that even before the Sheikh Said Revolt, Mustafa Kemal, İsmet İnönü, and the radical wing of the RPP were highly insecure about and sensitive toward any criticism, let alone political opposition. Therefore, they were highly suspicious of the formation of the new political party, the PRP, in opposition. It was almost a natural reflex to force the opposition to dissolve, for it was obvious that what the radical Kemalists hoped to accomplish and the methods to achieve them would be hindered by any political opposition. They were aware that use of religion would be a great weapon for the opposition in elections and that the new radical reforms required total silence.

In many primary sources, even those by members of Mustafa Kemal's inner circle, methods of accomplishing new reforms were regarded as despotic.¹³⁰ However, it should be noted that the political landscape of the early republic presented a dilemma for Mustafa Kemal. He would either deal with the opposition within democratic means at the expense of risking his reforms and position in power or entirely damage the opposition in a way that it could not recover in a meaningful way. Such a dilemma did not exist in the minds of Mustafa Kemal's radical followers, such as Recep (Peker), Mazhar Fuat, Kılıç Ali, Ali Saip, and so on. To them, the end justified the means, and the new regime (or their hold on power) had to be protected by any

means. The radical wing of the Kemalist faction—which controlled the means of power—opted for the latter; by doing so, however, it laid the very foundation of the political culture of republican Turkey. In the following decades, the successive governments' main goal was to tame, if not to eliminate, the opposition as much as possible and monopolize the government. Such a lack of respect for a healthy political opposition is also one of the problems modern Turkey faces even in the twenty-first century.

At this point, one may pose another significant question. If Mustafa Kemal and the radicals did not have much respect for political opposition, why did they insist on creating the new regime as a republic based on democratic principles? In my judgment, republicanism was the only viable regime for Mustafa Kemal and his friends after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal's assuming the title of caliph was not realistic and contradicted his own political orientation. However, as a soldier and a statesman who was influenced by the political ideals of the West, Mustafa Kemal's commitment to "republicanism" came only in the practical sense. The power struggle and the political realities of the country made it impossible for Mustafa Kemal to fully commit himself to practice true democracy. Therefore, lip service was always paid to this ideal, yet in reality, as the *Takrir-i Sükun* and the Independence Tribunal experience teach us, there was no obligation to practice it. Nor was there any remorse within the ranks of the RPP radicals that the regime was not a republic in which there existed room for political opposition.

When we look at more specific conclusions in this study, the first question becomes this: did the PRP and the İstanbul Press incite the Sheikh Said Revolt? All evidence suggests that this is not the case. Most participants of the Kurdish rebellion did not speak Turkish and were illiterate. There was little in common between the leaders of the rebellion and members of the press and of the PRP. Such a link was invented only to deal with the opposition. Avni (Doğan) Bey's memoirs also testify to the fact that the so-called established link between the journalists and the revolt was based on the false promises made to Sheikh Said if he accused the journalists in his testimony.

The closure of the PRP, the only legal opposition in Turkey, was also the direct result of the Sheikh Said Revolt. Although the government suggested a link between the revolt and PRP activities, it was not proven. It was the use of religion for political gain that was utilized as the pretext for the decision. Article 6 of the PRP program—the party respects religious opinions and beliefs—created an environment to

connect the individual's activities to the party in general. This article gave the government an opportunity to blame the entire party apparatus for the actions of individuals. It must be mentioned that the prosecutors clearly failed to prove without reasonable doubt that even the individuals who were accused of manipulating religion for political purposes were guilty as charged. Verdicts were handed down based on suspicious accounts by eyewitnesses, most of whom were active members of the rival party.

Foreign observers were following the developments in Ankara with great interest and making accurate evaluations. Let us end this study with one of those. After the passing of the *Takrir-i Sükun* Law and reactivation of the Independence Tribunals, Admiral Bristol, the U.S. high commissioner in İstanbul, sent his assessments to the secretary of state in Washington on May 8, 1925. It reads as follows:

Angora is rapidly modeling itself on the Tcheka. Its aim is seemingly to remove all political opposition; its methods are to convict on the basis of a settled policy and not on the evidence presented; its victims, in addition to nonconsequential citizens, are men of influence and standing. It has tried editors not only for the offensive use of a word, but for a state of mind. It has succeeded in so terrorizing the press, that its most flagrant lapses from equity have not even been criticized; it has so terrorized the opposition that protests are no longer being made against its unconstitutionality.

This diatribe may seem strong to the [State] Department, but I do not think it stronger than the circumstances justify. The atmosphere of suspicion and distrust which the activities of the Tribunal have engendered recalls the atmosphere of Hamidian days, and there is a distinct danger, if the appetite of the Tribunal grows with the eating, personal liberty may well be entirely suppressed in Turkey. . . .

[The trials of the journalists] may be regarded as yet further manifestations of the Government's decision to stamp out by strong measures all open opposition. Thus policy was perhaps never stated more forcibly and clearly than by Redjeb Bey, Minister of National Defense, who gave out the following interview to the "Hur-Fikir" (Free Thought) of Ismid: "All individuals or associations, whomsoever they may be, whose actions on Turkish soil are to the detriment of the Turk or Turkism, have no right to life, and are condemned to destruction. We will amputate all gangrenous limbs."¹³¹