

12 · The Transition to Democracy, 1945–50

Within a few years of the end of the Second World War, Turkey's political system, economic policies and foreign relations all underwent a fundamental change. In this chapter I will examine the factors behind the change and the way in which it came about.

Socio-economic pressure for change

By the end of the Second World War, İsmet Pasha İnönü's government had become deeply unpopular, even hated, by the large majority of the Turkish population for a variety of reasons. In analysing this discontent, one should make a distinction between the mass of the population (the peasants and industrial workers) and the segments of the coalition on which the Kemalist regime had been built (the officers and bureaucrats, the Muslim traders in the towns and the landowners in the countryside).

The regime had never been popular with the masses. The small farmers in the countryside, who at the time still made up about 80 per cent of the total population had not seen any great improvement in their standard of living, in health, education or communications. If we take something like electrification as a measure of modernization, we note that as late as 1953 the total number of villages that had been linked up to the electric grid was ten, or 0.025 per cent of Turkey's 40,000 villages!¹ While total production of electricity had grown tenfold between 1923 and 1943, it was still a phenomenon of city life, since Turkey had a grand total of nine miles of power lines in the latter year. Of the total energy capacity of 107,000 kilowatts available in 1945, 83,000 kilowatts went to Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir. And even so, the trolleybuses in Ankara had to stop when the lights went on.²

On the other hand, the one characteristic of the modern state with which the villagers had become familiar during the 25 years of Kemalist rule was the central state's effective control over the countryside. The gendarme and tax collector became more hated and feared than ever. Resentment against the state, in itself a traditional feature of

country life, became more acute because the state became more effective and visible. It was also exacerbated because the state's secularist policies, especially the suppression of expressions of popular faith, severed the most important ideological bond between state and subject.

Industrial workers were still a very small minority in Turkish society, some 330,000 in a population of around 20 million, but the exact number depends on what is understood by 'industrial'; the number mentioned includes many who were really employed in artisanal production.³ Their socio-economic position was weak. Until June 1945, organizations based on class, and trade unions were regarded as such, were still prohibited in Turkey, as were strikes. The workers, like the other wage and salary earners, had been badly hit in their purchasing power by the rising cost of living during the war.

Discontent among the mass of the population was not new and in itself would probably not have led to political change. More immediately important in this respect was the fact that İnönü's government lost the support of important elements of the 'Young Turk coalition' on which the Kemalist movement had been built. During the war, the government, faced with the necessity to feed and equip a large army, had paid for its needs by having the Central Bank print money, thus encouraging inflation. On the other hand, it had tried to mitigate the social effects of this policy by establishing price controls and by punitive taxation on excessive profits through the wealth tax and the tax on agricultural produce. The inflation had led to a sharp drop in purchasing power for the civil servants, who numbered about 220,000. For lower-ranking civil servants the drop was about one-third; for senior civil servants it was as high as two-thirds, which was something that led to tensions within the bureaucracy.⁴

Although its main victim had been the non-Muslim business community, the *varlık vergisi* (wealth tax) of 1942 had caused unrest and suspicion among the Turkish bourgeoisie in general. It had shown that the Kemalist regime, dominated as it was by bureaucrats and the military, was not an entirely dependable supporter of the interests of this group, whose essential vulnerability it had demonstrated. The position of the indigenous bourgeoisie, whose growth had been such a high priority for Unionists and Kemalists alike, had by now become so strong that it was no longer prepared to accept this position of a privileged, but essentially dependent and politically powerless, class.

Large landowners had been an essential element in the 'Young Turk coalition' since the First World War, but they had been alienated by the government's policy of artificially low pricing of agricultural produce to combat inflation during the war, by its 'tax on agricultural produce'

and especially by the introduction of a land distribution bill (the *çiftçiyi topraklandırma kanunu* or ‘law on giving land to the farmer’) in January 1945. This last bill, which President İnönü strongly promoted, played a crucial part in the emergence of political opposition in postwar Turkey.

Widespread discontent prevailed. Because of the Republican People’s Party’s close identification with the state apparatus under the one-party system, this resentment was directed at the party as much as it was at the state. İnönü was aware of these tensions and, remembering Atatürk’s experiment with the Free Party in 1930, he decided to allow a degree of political liberalization and the formation of a political opposition as a safety valve. That he and his government moved in this direction also owed something to international developments.

External pressures for democratization

In a very general sense, the defeat of the Axis powers in the Second World War was in itself a victory for democratic values. The United States of America, a pluralist, capitalist democracy, emerged from the war as the dominant world power and its example could not fail to impress many in Turkey, just as it did in countries all over the world. In April 1945 Turkey took part as a founding member in the San Francisco conference and, in signing the UN charter, committed itself to democratic ideals. There were, however, more immediate reasons why the Turkish government felt compelled to move closer to the West and especially to the United States.

A close relationship with the Soviet Union had been the cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but the relationship had been soured first by the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact and then by Turkey’s neutral stance during the war. The Soviet Union had announced that it would not renew the friendship treaty with Turkey after it lapsed in 1945 and in June that year, in conversations with the Turkish ambassador, Molotov formulated a number of conditions that would have to be met before a new friendship treaty could be signed. They included a correction of the border between the two countries, returning to the Soviet Union the areas in northeastern Anatolia that had been Russian between 1878 and 1918, and the establishment of a joint Turkish–Russian defence force in the area of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, in order to guard the Black Sea.⁵

These conditions were, of course, completely unacceptable to the Turks, but when the Soviets tabled their proposals at the inter-allied Potsdam conference in July, neither the British nor the Americans immediately rejected them. After all, Turkey’s wartime policies had not exactly endeared it to the Western allies. Gradually, however, the

United States became more supportive of the Turkish position. When the Soviet demands were communicated officially to Turkey in August 1946, the USA advised the Turkish government to take a firm line. Thus encouraged, Turkey refused the Soviet demands, but it did so in conciliatory terms, trying to keep down the tensions.

With concern about Stalin's policies in eastern Europe increasing with every communist regime established there, Washington began to re-evaluate the strategic importance of Turkey. Although theoretically the United Nations was the forum to which international conflicts could and should be referred, the constant use of the veto by the Soviet Union in the security council made working through the UN impossible, and the United States administration decided to act unilaterally. On 12 March 1947, President Truman launched his so-called 'Truman doctrine'. This stipulated that the USA should and would help defend 'free nations' whose existence was threatened by foreign pressure or by militant minorities inside their borders. The occasion for the promulgation of the doctrine was a proposal by President Truman to the US congress for military and financial support for Greece (where the civil war between communists and monarchists was raging at the time) and Turkey. It was the start of the American commitment to the defence of anti-communist regimes throughout the world. Shortly afterwards, in June 1947, the Marshall Plan, envisaging financial support on a gigantic scale to the European countries to help them rebuild their economies, was put forward. This plan had three complementary aims: to help the Europeans help themselves; to sustain lucrative export markets for US industry; and to eliminate poverty as a breeding ground for communism.

It was clear to the Turkish leadership that, in order to profit fully from the American political and military support and from the Marshall Plan, it would be helpful for Turkey to conform more closely to the political and economic ideals (democracy and free enterprise) cherished by the Americans. Thus we can say that the political and economic change in Turkey after 1945 had both domestic and international roots.

The process of democratization

The first sign that the government was considering a change of direction came even before the end of the war, when İnönü strongly emphasized the democratic parliamentary character of the Turkish political system in his speech at the opening of the parliamentary year on 1 November 1944. On 19 May 1945, he elaborated this theme and promised measures to make the regime more democratic, without as yet specifying what these measures would be.

Also in May, the Land Distribution Law, which had first been put forward in January, came up for discussion in the national assembly. Turkey was still overwhelmingly a nation of small farmers. Some 99.75 per cent of the landownership consisted of farms with fewer than 500 *dönüm* (125 acres) of land. Properties of more than 5000 *dönüm* comprised only 0.01 per cent; most farmers held far fewer than 125 acres. There were great differences between the regions but in the more affluent agricultural areas a holding of between 25 and 50 *dönüm* (6–12 acres) was typical.⁶ Many of the small farmers led a marginal existence. There was not enough arable land to sustain the approximately three million peasant families and a holding of between six and twelve acres meant existing on, and in many cases below, the poverty line. As a result a great many farmers had long since become sharecroppers with a very low standard of living. As a rule a large landowner or an affluent city dweller supplied them with seeds and equipment and took from a quarter to a half of the harvest in return.

The law introduced in the assembly in May 1945 aimed to provide adequate land for farmers who had none or too little by distributing unused state lands, lands from pious endowments (*evkaf*), reclaimed land, land without clear ownership and land expropriated from landowners who owned more than 500 *dönüm*. Under article 17 of the law even up to three-quarters of the land owned by farmers with more than 200 *dönüm* (50 acres) could be expropriated in densely populated areas. The peasants would also be given 20-year interest-free loans.

The discussions of this bill in the assembly were the first occasion when the government was openly and vehemently criticized. The opposition came from members with landowning connections and their spokesman was Adnan Menderes, himself a large landowner from Aydın. The opposition first focused on economic arguments (contending that the proposed land redistribution undermined the security of property, would impede investment and would lead to inefficient farming) but the autocratic way in which the government handled the debate also led to protests about the lack of democracy in the country, which were again led by Menderes.

In the end, the law was passed unanimously, despite the acrimonious debates – a clear indication of the discipline that still governed the RPP – but very soon after, on 7 June, Menderes, with three other deputies, Celâl Bayar (the former prime minister), Refik Koraltan and Fuat Köprülü (a famous historian) submitted a memorandum to the parliamentary party demanding that the Turkish constitution be implemented in full and democracy established. This *Dörtlü Takrir* (Memorandum of the Four), as it has become known, seemed to aim at a reform of the

RPP rather than at the establishment of an opposition party, but it nevertheless marked the beginning of organized political opposition after the war.

The parliamentary party rejected the proposals of the four, but the four were not themselves in any way punished for their temerity. This was generally interpreted as a sign that the government was prepared to allow a certain relaxation of the political climate. There were other signs that pointed in this direction. Some newspapers, notably the liberal (and American-orientated) *Vatan* (Fatherland) of Ahmet Emin Yalman and the leftist *Tan* (Dawn) of Zekeriya and Sabiha Sertel began to support the 'Four', giving them room in their columns to express their ideas. When, a week after the submission of the *Dörtlülük Takriri*, by-elections were held in Istanbul, the government for the first time allowed a free choice between different candidates of the RPP.

Strictly speaking, the multi-party period began in July when a prominent Istanbul industrialist, Nuri Demirağ, founded an opposition party, the *Millî Kalkınma Partisi* (National Development Party), which was officially registered on 5 September. The NDP's platform consisted of a call for liberalization of the economy and the development of free enterprise. The party had no experienced politicians among its members and no representation in the national assembly. It was therefore not very effective and drew little support. The real breakthrough came slightly later when Adnan Menderes and Fuat Köprülü, followed shortly afterwards by Refik Koraltan, were officially ousted from the Republican People's Party on 21 September because of the critical articles they had written in *Tan* and *Vatan*.

In a speech on 1 November, İsmet İnönü declared that the main shortcoming of Turkish democracy was the lack of an opposition party (apparently disregarding the National Development Party) and he announced that the general elections scheduled for 1947 would be free and direct – as opposed to the two-stage system with electors that was still in place at the time. At the beginning of December, Celâl Bayar resigned from the RPP. All four signatories of the 'Memorandum of the Four' had now left or been forced to leave the governing party and it was clear that the establishment of a new party was in the offing. In the preparations for launching the new party Bayar and İnönü worked closely together. The fact that Bayar was a veteran Young Turk, and trusted as someone who subscribed to the fundamental tenet of secularism, undoubtedly eased the acceptance of the existence of an opposition party by the Kemalist bureaucracy and party. For the new party it created a problem. While it was clear that the 'Four' would be dependent on İsmet İnönü's goodwill during the embryonic phase of the new

party, the collaboration between Bayar and İnönü gave the impression that the creation of the party was the result of collusion and this would prove an accusation the new party would have difficulty in living down.

The *Demokrat Parti* (Democratic Party) was officially registered on 7 January 1946 and it was at first welcomed by the RPP and its organs, which took their lead from İnönü. Once the DP started establishing branches it became clear that it met with an enthusiastic response all over the country. The RPP leadership, which had been aware of the existence of discontent, was still shocked by its extent. An extraordinary congress was called for May 1946. It took a number of liberalizing measures: it accepted direct elections and the position of permanent chairman of the party was abolished, as was the title of *millî şef* (national leader). İnönü still remained chairman, of course, but he would now have to be re-elected. Soon after the congress, the press law was liberalized and the universities received a degree of autonomy, but national elections were brought forward from July 1947 to July 1946, clearly in the hope of catching the Democrats before they were fully established. The Democrats protested and even considered boycotting the elections (as they had boycotted the municipal elections earlier in the year), but in the end they took part and managed to win 62 of the 465 seats in the assembly.

On the face of it, this was a considerable, but not a spectacular success for the new party, but the reality was different. One reason the RPP was returned with a majority was that there had been massive vote rigging. The electoral procedures were far from perfect: there was no guarantee of secrecy during the actual voting; there was no impartial supervision of the elections and, as soon as the results were declared, the actual ballots were destroyed, making any check impossible. It has to be remembered that at this time all local and provincial administrators were RPP party members, who had great difficulty in discriminating between political opposition and high treason. The scale of the fraud was so obvious that there was an outcry in the country. Celâl Bayar stated that, according to a DP inquiry, the real number of seats won by the party was much higher and that there had been 'wickedness involved in the election'. His statement to this effect was published in the newspapers in disregard of a government notice that strictly forbade any criticism of the elections.⁷

Faced with widespread support for the DP, the RPP had a choice: either to suppress the opposition as it had done in 1925 and 1930, or to go further down the path of liberalization. For a year after the elections of 1946, the party seemed to hesitate between these alternatives. İnönü selected Recep Peker, who was considered the most prominent hard-

liner in the party and a supporter of the one-party state, as his new prime minister in August. Peker tried to intimidate the opposition into conducting itself as junior partner of the government and refraining from the constant attacks it launched against the RPP. This, however, the DP refused to do. The fraudulent behaviour of the RPP bureaucrats during the elections had thoroughly poisoned the atmosphere, but another reason why the opposition kept up its acrimonious criticism of the government was because its own programme differed less and less from that of the RPP. The DP subscribed to the basic Kemalist tenets of nationalism and secularism, so it could not differentiate itself from the government on that score. The points on which it had originally differed from the RPP (political and economic liberalization) were to a large extent taken over by the governing party between 1947 and 1950. So the DP needed an atmosphere of constant high tension to mobilize public opinion. It therefore introduced new complaints in the assembly almost on a daily basis.

Another way in which both parties tried to distinguish themselves from the other was by tarring each other with the brush of communism. The end of the Second World War had ushered in a period of relative tolerance for the left, while the government saw fit to suppress the extreme (and pan-Turkist) right. Even in this immediate postwar period there were elements in the RPP that identified the emerging opposition with a 'communism' it detested. On 4 December 1945, a crowd of nationalist students, who had been aroused by inflammatory articles in the RPP press, sacked the offices of the leftist newspaper *Tan*, which had been publishing articles by the future DP leaders, and destroyed its printing presses. Police were present but did not intervene. Nevertheless, in June 1946, a socialist party and even the communist *Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi* (Turkish Socialist Workers and Peasants' Party) led by the veteran communist Dr Şefik Hüsnü Değmer were founded.

But the effects of the cold war soon began to be felt and, in December 1946, martial law regulations were used to close down these parties. The DP and the RPP now started mud-slinging campaigns in which they accused each other of being soft on communism. The DP was even accused of being in the pay of Moscow. The years 1948 and 1949 saw a witch-hunt against the left. Prominent pan-Turkists like Nihal Atsız and Zeki Velidi Togan, who had been prosecuted at the end of the Second World War, were rehabilitated and their most vocal opponent, the socialist novelist Sabahattin Ali was murdered by one of Atsız's supporters.

Relations between the parties went from bad to worse. The dis-

cussions on the 1947 budget were extremely hostile and at one time the prime minister described Menderes as a psychopath, whereupon the Democrats left the assembly and boycotted its meetings for a few days. In January 1947, the DP held its first congress, at which the representatives adopted the *Hürriyet Misaki* (Freedom Pact), a term that not coincidentally echoed the famous *Millî Misak* (National Pact) of 1920. The DP saw itself as the new political wave that would finish what Atatürk had begun. He had brought national independence and reformed Turkish society; they would now complete his reforms by introducing democracy. The Freedom Pact authorized the DP members of parliament to leave and boycott the national assembly unless the government withdrew a number of undemocratic laws. This was a serious threat because the Peker government, whose legitimacy was doubtful because of the ballot rigging in 1946, could not afford to be seen as anti-democratic by the people and the outside world – certainly not with the growing importance of American aid.

The DP and the RPP were clearly on a collision course, but in July 1947 İnönü intervened. He held separate talks with Peker and Bayar and then gave out a statement to the press. This so-called ‘Twelfth of July Declaration’ legitimized the existence of the opposition and called upon the state apparatus to be impartial and to deal even-handedly with both parties. It was the decisive intervention by the president that made it clear that multi-party politics were there to stay. Within the RPP it meant the defeat of the hard-liners led by Recep Peker, who had to resign and was succeeded as prime minister by Hasan Saka, significantly the minister of foreign affairs who had headed the Turkish delegation at the San Francisco conference.

At its congress in November 1947, the RPP moved even closer to the DP programme. It advocated free enterprise and decided to retract article 17 of the Land Distribution Law (something the assembly eventually did in 1950). It also tried to counter the way in which the Democrats played the religious card and decided to allow religious education in the schools and to reform the Village Institutes, which DP propaganda had targeted and depicted as centres of communist agitation.

It is a measure of the discipline within the RPP that the party did not split after İsmet İnönü had so emphatically sided with the reformists and disavowed the hard-liners. The new conciliatory line of the People’s Party did cause serious problems for the Democrats, however, who were essentially bound together by their joint opposition to the RPP, not by a coherent political programme of their own. Several groups of representatives, who considered the DP leadership too

moderate and wanted a more uncompromising opposition to the RPP, split off from the main body. One group founded the *Millet Partisi* (Nation Party) with Marshal Fevzi Çakmak (who had been an implacable enemy of İnönü ever since the latter had dismissed him as chief of staff in 1944) as its figurehead. The result was that by 1949 the DP faction in parliament had been halved, but at the same time it had become a much more coherent body. Hasan Saka reshuffled his cabinet once, in June 1948, and in 1949 someone who was even more of a compromise figure, Şemsettin Günaltay, a university professor with known Islamist leanings, replaced him.

The main bone of contention between the two parties remained the election law that was changed several times under pressure from the opposition, which threatened to boycott the national elections scheduled for 1950 if completely free and fair elections could not be guaranteed. It specifically demanded supervision of the elections, not by the administration but by the judiciary. Finally, in February 1950, a compromise was reached, just in time for the elections of 14 May 1950.

Social and economic reform

As in the process of political reform, 1947 was the turning point in the adoption of new economic policies. Up to then, the RPP was still wedded to the policy of 'statism' (*devletçilik*) introduced in the 1930s. This policy increasingly came under attack, both from indigenous business circles and from the Americans. The DP made itself the voice of the indigenous criticism. Menderes sometimes went so far as to depict statism as a discredited relic of fascism. The more moderate leaders of the DP, such as Celâl Bayar, wanted to change the role of the state in the economy from direct intervention to coordination and support of private initiative. In their eyes, private enterprise should have absolute priority and the state should only intervene where private enterprise failed or could not hope to succeed through lack of capital. In January 1947 a number of Istanbul businessmen founded the *İstanbul Tüccar Derneği* (Association of Istanbul Traders), the first such group not to be controlled by the government. It criticized statism, which it held responsible for the lack of economic progress in the country, and supported the ideas put forward by the Democrats.

At the same time, Turkey, impoverished as it was after the years of wartime mobilization, was desperate for American financial assistance. In order to facilitate this, the Turkish government had already applied for membership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in order to qualify for membership, it took the so-called '7 September Decisions' of 1946. Essentially, these meant a devaluation of the Turkish

lira by 120 per cent (the first of many devaluations of the republican era) and a number of liberalizing measures aimed at integrating the Turkish economy into the world economy.

In 1946, the RPP drew up a new economic five-year plan. It was similar to prewar plans, with an emphasis on autarky and state control (its authors came from the *Kadro* circle, which had been active in the 1932–34 period), but in 1947 it was ditched and a new ‘Turkish Development Plan’ was adopted, which echoed the wishes of the Istanbul businessmen and of the DP. It emphasized free enterprise, the development of agriculture and agriculturally based industry (instead of heavy industry), roads instead of railways and development of the energy sector (oil). The RPP congress of November 1947 embraced the plan wholeheartedly. From this time onwards, there was hardly any difference between the economic policies of the DP and of the RPP, the one exception being that the DP wanted to sell off the state industries, while the RPP did not. An ‘economic congress’ held in Istanbul in November 1948 (following the one held in İzmir in 1923) was even more emphatic in its support for liberal economic policies. Significantly, it was organized by a civil organization, the Association of Istanbul Traders (*İstanbul Tüccar Derneği*) and not by the state or a party.⁸

From 1948 onwards, the Democratic argument was much reinforced by the activities, and later the reports, of American fact-finding missions that reported on possibilities for economic development in Turkey and on how American aid should be given and used. These commissions, the best known of which was headed by industrialist Max Thornburg for the World Bank, whose report came out in 1949, were very influential in government circles, both in Turkey and in the USA. Their recommendations were entirely in line with the Turkish Development Plan of 1947.

For the Turkish economy, the years between 1945 and 1950 were years of growth (roughly 11 per cent growth in GDP per year), but it should not be forgotten that this was partly a recovery from the very low level of economic activity of the Second World War. Two indications that the relative autarky of Turkey was coming to an end, and that incorporation was speeding up, were the fact that most of the economic growth was in the agricultural sector and that from 1947 onwards, the trade surplus changed into a persistent trade deficit, due to fast-rising imports of machinery. This means that the economic trends that were to be characteristic of DP rule after 1950 actually started before the takeover of power by that party.

The government’s social policies did not change as much as its economic policies during this time. When the ban on organizations with a

class base was lifted in 1946, a number of trade unions sprang up, just in time for Turkey to be able to join the ILO, the International Labour Organization (which was linked to the UN). But most of the unions were small-scale affairs and the most active among them were linked to the communist TSWPP or the socialist TSP. In December 1946 the martial law regulations were invoked to close them down along with the two parties.

In 1947, a new 'Law on Trade Unions' was passed, giving the right of organization in trade unions to the workers, but at the same time forbidding political activity by trade unions, as well as strikes. Despite the ban on political activity both the DP and the RPP actively sought the support of the unions, which were founded in 1947, and the DP promised to grant them the right to strike once it took power. In reality, it took another decade for Turkish workers to gain that right. Apart from the restrictive policies of the different governments, the position of these embryonic unions was fundamentally weak because of the small number of industrial workers, their low level of education and their extreme poverty, which made it well nigh impossible to collect sufficient union dues.

The elections of 14 May 1950

The climax of the whole period of transition came with the elections of May 1950. They went off without major incident and by all accounts were indeed free and fair. The turnout was very high, with 80 per cent of the electorate casting its vote. When the results were announced, public opinion was stunned: the Democratic Party, which had campaigned with the slogan 'Enough! Now the people have their say', had won 53.4 per cent of the vote against the RPP's 39.8 per cent. Under the Turkish electoral system this meant that the DP received 408 seats in the new parliament against the RPP's 69. The RPP did not win a single province in the more developed west of the country – all the provinces it won were to the east of Ankara and that it did manage to hold on to them was largely because power brokers loyal to the RPP such as notables, tribal chiefs and large landowners controlled the vote in the less-developed regions.

The results were celebrated in an atmosphere of liberation all over the country, but they were a bitter disappointment to İnönü. In spite of his efforts to cut the ground from beneath the DP by introducing far-reaching political and economic liberalization, the memory of the years of repression, of which İsmet Pasha himself was very much the symbol, weighed too heavily with the electorate – it did not trust the RPP's 'new look'. It is probably correct to say, however, that the victory of the DP

would have been even more comprehensive, had the elections been held two years earlier.

Although the details have never been established, some elements within the military seem to have offered to stage a coup for İnönü and nullify the elections. To his eternal credit, İnönü stuck to the course he had set five years earlier. He had wanted to establish a loyal – but basically powerless – opposition. He had miscalculated, but now he accepted the consequences and handed over power with good grace and, after 14 years as prime minister and 12 as president, devoted himself to the duties of a leader of the opposition.

The DP now about to rule Turkey was an entirely new phenomenon in Turkish politics, not because of its programme (which it has been noted closely resembled that of the RPP, certainly after 1947) but because the party, which had its roots in a split within the ruling ‘Young Turk’ coalition, was the first political organization in the country’s modern history with a genuine mass following that had been able to express its support in a free election.

It has often been said that the peaceful transition from a dictatorship to multi-party democracy in Turkey in 1946 and the equally peaceful handover of power four years later is a unique experience in the developing world. However, one should not overlook the fact that Turkey, though socio-economically in many ways a developing country, had had a heritage of experiments with parliamentary election since 1876, and of multi-party democracy between 1908 and 1913, between 1923 and 1925 and in 1930. Although democracy had only shallow roots and had been easily repressed, it did not have to be built from scratch.