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THE RISE OF THE JUSTICE PARTY IN TURKEY

By W. B. SHERWOOD

IN a world in which popular democracy sometimes seems on the defensive, the rise of the Justice party has a significance that goes beyond the borders of Turkey. That nation's continuing social and political revolution, obscured as it has been in the eyes of most foreigners by the cruel impasse of Cyprus and the revival of Greek-Turkish antagonisms in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, is worth trying to understand. Not only does multiparty rivalry exist, but political power in this important American ally is held by the Near East's only genuine grass-roots political party. This party has its roots deep in the country's social structure and is currently headed by an energetic and intelligent young leader of relatively humble origins.

In October 1965 the Justice party, successor to Menderes' Democrat party, won a resounding electoral victory and took over the reins of power in one of the Near East's rare bloodless changes of government. This election victory also marked the emergence of the party leader as a major new political figure on the Turkish scene. Suleyman Demirel, husky, balding, engineer-administrator, deserves much credit for the success of the Justice party, but it would be a mistake to view the rise of the party as his personal triumph. Demirel is not the charismatic father-figure or tribal chieftain of recent Turkish tradition, e.g., Kemal Atatürk, Ismet İnönü, or Adnan Menderes. Although he obviously resembles Menderes more than the others, Demirel is basically a modern, pragmatic executive and organizer, rather than an inspired leader possessed of a special kind of personalism. Furthermore, it may be that at this moment in history Turkey needs a modern politician, rather than a father or chieftain, at the helm. At any rate, the majority of the Turkish voters thought so in October 1965, and the contrast between the younger, earthy Demirel and his chief rival, the essentially autocratic Pasha, Ismet İnönü, could not be greater.

In short, the victory of the Justice party was not the personal triumph of a new, magnetic leader, but the victory of an organized, broadly based political party with genuine popular roots. Statistically, the party won fifty-three percent of the popular vote in the 1965 election and 240 of 450 seats in the National Assembly. The Republican People's

party, which had ruled Turkey since 1920 with the exception of the Menderes decade (1950-1960), suffered the worst defeat of its political history, winning only 134 seats and twenty-nine percent of the vote. Even the Justice party's own partisans were surprised by the magnitude of its victory. A plurality had been a foregone conclusion, but many doubted that the party, which was under heavy attack from "intellectuals" and influential segments of the national press, could obtain a full majority. However, it did win and achieved an absolute majority in Turkey's National Assembly. Subsequently Demirel was designated prime minister by Cemal Gürsel, then president of Turkey, and formed the government that rules Turkey today.

Ironically, the accession to power of such a party is not viewed as an unmixed blessing within Turkey, where the Justice party is bitterly opposed by a substantial majority of the country's urban intellectual class, who doubt that a party or government responsive to the demands of the peasantry can solve Turkey's pressing economic and social problems. Most of these intellectuals favor the elitist Republican People's party, with others associating themselves with the Marxist Turkish Labor party. It is a paradox of Turkish politics that the latter, supposedly a socialist party, shares the narrow elitist outlook of the Republican People's party and has been equally unsuccessful in appealing to the masses. It is in its appeal to the masses that the Justice party has been most dramatically successful.

THE BROAD BASIS OF JUSTICE PARTY APPEAL¹

The appeal of the Justice party and its predecessor, the Democrat party, is not ideological, but is rooted in the social structure of Turkey. The party's greatest support comes from the small-holder peasants, who are emerging from poverty and a subsistence way of life. They are allied with expanding, but still small, commercial, industrial, urban labor groups and newly wealthy farmers. These groups represent the familiar sociological phenomenon of rising social groups in competition with an older elite. The Republican People's party is the party of

¹ I have chosen to ignore the issues that developed, or seemed to develop, during the 1965 electoral campaign. Rather, in this analysis I have concentrated on the broad appeal of the Justice party and on what I conceive to be the fundamental differences between it and the Republican People's party. Joseph Szyliowicz has treated the election campaign in some detail in "The Turkish Elections: 1965," *Middle East Journal*, xx (Autumn 1966), 473-94. While Mr. Szyliowicz's facts are correct, I must take issue with his interpretation. For instance, he writes that the chief issues were "land reform, foreign policy, petroleum, foreign capital, and foreign trade." These topics did receive a great deal of newspaper attention, but, I submit, were "issues" only to a handful of intellectuals. The real issue was the clash of opposing socioeconomic groups.

the older elite, representing those classes that came to dominate the latter days of the Ottoman Empire as well as the first twenty-five years of the republic, i.e., bureaucrats, city intellectuals, military officers, and the traditional class of “notables” in the countryside, including many large landowners. Some in this latter group received land primarily because of loyalty and services rendered during the Greek-Turkish War (1919-1922) to the predecessor of the Republican People’s party, Atatürk’s “Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia.”²

Thus the Justice party represents the challengers for the power of an older ruling class. It stands for the manufacturer eager to challenge the entrenched bureaucrats in the state enterprises, or the newly prosperous small tobacco farmer determined to be independent of the domination of his social betters. Rooted in a social movement, it is not dependent on the presence of a charismatic leader for its cohesion. Many thought the old Democrat party, lacking a strong ideology, would fall apart following the downfall of Menderes. It merely reformed itself into the Justice party, almost without leadership.

Voting patterns bear out this analysis. Appealing to rising and newly prosperous social groups, the Justice party, as might be expected, runs most strongly in the relatively prosperous provinces of Western Turkey—along the Aegean, in Thrace (European Turkey), and in the Marmara and Black Sea regions. These are areas where the majority of the population is composed of independent, land-owning villagers. These are also areas where many cash crops (cotton, tobacco, grapes, figs, nuts, citrus) are grown, where villages are rapidly growing into towns, and where the money economy is firmly established. By contrast, the Republican People’s party, although slipping badly everywhere outside of İnönü’s home province of Malatya (eastern Turkey), has shown its greatest strength in places where there are large concentrations of the military-bureaucratic classes, e.g., Ankara, and in the very backward eastern provinces, where the land-owning *aghas* retain their traditional control over the peasantry and are able to deliver the vote to whichever party they favor.³ The small Nation party, which appeals most directly to religious and social conservatism, shows its

² For discussions of the composition of Turkish political parties, particularly at the local level, see A. Haluk Ülman and Frank Tachau, “Turkish Politics: The Attempt to Reconcile Rapid Modernization With Democracy,” *Middle East Journal*, xix (Spring 1965), 153-68; and Kemal H. Karpat, “Society, Economics, and Politics in Contemporary Turkey,” *World Politics*, xvii (October 1964), 50-74.

³ It should not be inferred that the *aghas* support only the Republican People’s party. They are quite flexible in their loyalties.

greatest strength in the central plateau, while the small extremist parties of Right and Left, the Republican Peasant's Nation party and the Turkish Labor party, are strongest in the large cities (but even there, they have very limited strength, as the Justice party usually carries the largest cities, with the exception of Ankara, on the basis of its overwhelming support from the urban lower class).

The urban lower class is primarily composed of former Anatolian villagers crowded into the squatter areas of the large cities. The squatters share the aspirations of the rising peasantry. Many of them maintain ties with their home villages and tend to maintain their former voting patterns. Most of these urban peasants, now in the process of becoming urban labor, have come from the relatively prosperous areas of Turkey previously mentioned, not so much having been forced off the land by poverty as having been drawn by the attraction of city life. Once an Anatolian villager makes contact with the outside world through radio, travel, movies, and newly opened bus and truck lines, or even through political campaigns, the deadly monotony of the village becomes the more unbearable. For the most part, these are not destitute, landless laborers, although in some areas excessive fragmentation has undoubtedly played a part in encouraging the movement of villagers to the city.

The squatter areas are currently the scene of a struggle between the Justice and Labor parties, with the Justice party greatly in the lead for the present. Much of its success is due to its strong local organizations, which function as service organizations for the squatters. A typical villager arriving in Ankara or Istanbul goes immediately to that district populated by people from his home village. The local Justice party man helps him settle, aids him in problems with the authorities, and functions as an employment agency or a marriage bureau, as the case may be. The Justice party representative is always a resident of the district. The Labor party or Republican People's party man, in contrast, is almost always an outsider. The Labor party, however, at least recognizes the problem and is trying to put down grass roots, while the Republican People's party does not really compete. The foregoing description also demonstrates the importance that competing political parties have assumed in Turkish life, by providing channels for getting things done outside of the traditionally slow and still generally unresponsive bureaucracy.

The old Democrat party, although its power base was as described above, also had some very sophisticated people in its ranks. These included important groups in the Istanbul business community and a

minority of high-level civil servants whose careers, sometimes for family reasons, were tied to the Menderes regime. In recent years many of these people have returned to the fold. In Istanbul, for example, in the early days following the overthrow of the Menderes regime on May 27, 1960, many middle- and upper-class ex-Democrats either stayed out of politics or turned to the New Turkey party, which had a more respectable image. Now, however, many have returned to the Justice party, both because of its increasingly moderate and pro-business face and because of the demise of the New Turkey party. The same thing is happening among a small minority of civil servants, in marked contrast to the pattern of the preceding six years. Quite clearly an important reason for this return is the presumed neutrality of the army⁴—it is no longer considered dangerous to belong to the Justice party, although it is socially unacceptable in many circles.

The Justice party is frequently called “pro-business.” However its attitude toward business, although favorable in the Turkish context, is not one of dogmatic support of free enterprise. Both the Democrat and Justice parties have always promised to “free Turkey from the dead hand of the bureaucracy” and to free the peasant from onerous “control” from above. This philosophy goes quite naturally with a relatively favorable attitude toward private business. In Turkey, however, there are no large concentrations of economic power in private hands, as exist in the United States and Europe. Therefore, being “pro-business” in Turkey is not the same thing as supporting the interests of large corporate enterprises in the United States. The true economic conservative in Turkey is as likely to be an entrenched bureaucrat in a state economic enterprise as a monopolistic export merchant in the Aegean. It is also well to keep in mind that the late Adnan Menderes, although proclaiming himself a believer in “free enterprise” and dubious about the value of detailed economic planning, did not reduce the size of Turkey’s state enterprises. Instead, he made them his own machines for economic expansion.

The Justice party’s attitude toward religion cannot be separated from its basic appeal to the peasantry. Although the party is identified in the public mind as being sympathetic toward Islam, the claims of its opponents that it is the party of religious reaction and that its success at the polls is primarily a result of its reckless and demagogic exploitation of the religious feelings of ignorant people cannot be taken

⁴ The relations between the Justice party and the army are discussed in the following section.

seriously. This is an argument that, although widely repeated as a rationalization of the Republican People's party's lack of success at the polls, ignores not only the secular nature of the Justice party leadership, but also the materialistic nature of the bread-and-butter issues the party has successfully exploited.

On the other hand, as a popular party whose success has rested on responsiveness to the desires of the people, and particularly of the peasantry, the Justice party, as did the Democrat party before it, has responded to the obvious desire of many Turks for a relaxation of the militant antireligious campaign carried out by the republican reformers. For example, in well-known moves, the Democrat party in the early fifties allowed the prayers to be said in the traditional Arabic and permitted religious instruction in the schools, although a parent could request that his child be excused. Furthermore, Menderes built mosques in the villages as well as roads and schools. The Justice party is following the same tradition. However, conversations with villagers do not bear out the contention of opposition intellectuals that the present government has won the support of the peasantry merely by pandering to its religious inclinations. The peasants simply list mosques along with water, roads, educational opportunity for their children, and government support of agricultural prices as the things they expect from any government or party soliciting their votes.

A DEMOCRATIC EVOLUTION: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY

The October 1965 accession to power of the Justice party was merely the latest episode in Turkey's experiment with democracy. The experiment was the first tried in the 1870's with the writing of Turkey's first constitution, was resumed in the few years after 1908, when there was briefly a genuine attempt to make the constitution work, and again in the early 1920's, when the first republican constitution was written. In 1950, genuine popular democracy was launched with great hopes and no little fanfare, as Adnan Menderes won a stunning election victory. It was then almost strangled by the excesses committed by Menderes' government in the late 1950's, staggered by the military coup of May 27, 1960, and threatened again by military adventurers in the early 1960's. But through it all, Turkish democracy has shown amazing vitality. Within eighteen months after its seizure of power in 1960, the ruling military junta, the Committee of National Unity, had turned Turkey back to parliamentary government. Free elections were held

in October 1961, and although military pressures have sometimes been none too subtle, since then Turkey has been ruled in an essentially free and democratic manner by an elected civilian government.

It was following the May 27 coup that the Justice party was first organized. It was founded by a handful of ambitious men, many with limited political experience, who hoped to capitalize on the large numbers of Democrats left partyless after their party had been banned by the Committee of National Unity. The new party got off to a fast start in Turkey's western provinces where, although there were few former Democrats in its top leadership, it picked up most of the old Democrat provincial organizations intact. In central Anatolia it was somewhat less successful, meeting competition for the ex-Democrat vote from the small but long-established Republican Peasants' Nation party. In eastern Turkey it did poorly, as the newly formed New Turkey party was first on the scene to capture the old Democrat organizations.

When the Committee of National Unity restored the government to civilian control in the fall of 1961 and elections were held, the Justice party captured some thirty-five percent of the vote; the Republican People's party won thirty-seven percent while the small parties gained fifteen percent each. It is doubtful that the Committee would have been so enthusiastic about elections had it realized that the Republican People's party would fare so badly. However, despite the clear sentiment of the majority of Turks against this party, the military rulers insisted on Ismet İnönü, the party leader, as prime minister, and there followed a series of coalition governments headed by İnönü. During these years, the Justice party steadily gained adherents, primarily at the expense of the two smaller parties, as the ex-Democrats tended to gather under one roof.

Under these circumstances, the November 1963 nationwide local elections took on great importance, as they were widely viewed as a political referendum. When the Justice party received some forty-six percent of the vote, with the Republican People's party's share remaining at thirty-seven percent and the smaller parties showing corresponding losses, the then current coalition government fell and was replaced by a minority government of the Republican People's party and a few independents, Ismet İnönü again serving as prime minister. The establishment of this third İnönü coalition government set the stage for the subsequent entry into the government of the Justice party.

During this same period, within the Justice party several groups were struggling for leadership. At first, there were a number of military

officers in important positions (most of these had been purged from the army following the 1960 coup). They were slowly pushed to the sidelines and lost most of their influence after the death of the party's first leader, retired Lieutenant General Ragip Gümüşpala, in the summer of 1964.

Another group that threatened to dominate the party in its early years was the right-wing clique led by Gökhan Evliyaoğlu. The issue was settled, however, when Evliyaoğlu failed in his attempt to bring into the party, at a high level, Alpaslan Türkeş, a well-known right-wing Turkish racist and a key figure in the 1960 coup.⁵ Evliyaoğlu finally resigned from the Justice party in the spring of 1965, joining Türkeş in the Republican Peasants' Nation party, which then passed entirely into the hands of the extreme rightist element. Although some of this radical fringe remains in the Justice party, its voice is muted.

Following Gümüşpala's death, a former country doctor, Sadettin Bilgiç, became acting president-general of the party and was initially considered the favorite to become party leader. Bilgiç, however, was tarred by the press, perhaps unfairly, with the brush of extreme political and religious conservatism. Many in the party, worried about the party's image in the eyes of the intellectuals and about its relations with the army, felt the need for a more progressive leader. Suleyman Demirel, who had been chief of the State Water Resources Development Agency under the Menderes government and had acquired a degree of fame as a builder of dams, had been active in Justice party affairs since the party's founding.⁶ Popular with many of the party's local officials, particularly in populous western Turkey, he was an obvious choice and defeated Bilgiç in a hotly contested election for the post of party president-general at the Justice party's December 1964 national convention.

Demirel's victory gave the Justice party a more progressive face and was initially hailed with enthusiasm even by the party's press critics. An interesting sidelight is that Demirel was quietly supported in the struggle by some of the old Democrat leaders in the background, including ex-President Celal Bayar himself. Bilgiç also had old Democrat connections through his older brother, Sait, who had been jailed

⁵ For a few months, Türkeş, in his capacity as secretary-general to the chief of state, General Gürsel, was virtually prime minister of Turkey.

⁶ It is interesting to note that Demirel, as a university graduate, qualifies as an "intellectual" by Turkish standards. It should be noted that he and several of his closest associates graduated from the relatively new Istanbul Technical University, rather than from the traditionally elitist Istanbul Law Faculty or Ankara Political Science Faculty, which have produced most of Turkey's civilian leaders.

following the coup. When the issue was joined, however, the old Democrats, a rather sophisticated group politically, favored Demirel. Since that time there has been some evidence that these old Democrats, including Bayar, have been less enthusiastic about Demirel, perhaps because of his obvious determination to be his own man.

Under the Demirel leadership, the party moved rapidly both to put its own house in order and to prepare for the October 1965 elections. In an unexpected move, Demirel arranged an alliance with the small parties in the National Assembly and in February 1965 brought down the third İnönü coalition government on a budget vote. In early March, a new coalition government was formed containing the Justice, New Turkey, Republican Peasants' Nation, and Nation parties. (The Nation party had previously split off from the Republican Peasants' Nation party.) Suat Hayri Ürgüplü, a political neutral and former ambassador to Washington, became prime minister with Demirel as deputy prime minister, setting the stage for the Justice party's subsequent victory in the October 1965 elections.

Entry into the government gave the Justice party some immediate advantages. Primarily, it meant that the Republican People's party no longer controlled the election machinery, and it assured the Justice party of at least the neutrality of the bureaucracy, which was traditionally allied with the Republican People's party. It also gave Demirel a chance to demonstrate his "acceptability" and "responsibility" to the army. This was vital because, in order for the Justice party to assume power, it was necessary not only that it win an election, but also that it arrive at an accommodation with Turkey's senior military officers, who feared that the party would embark on a course of revenge for the 1960 coup. Demirel succeeded in arriving at the necessary accommodation.

Although the details are hazy, it is widely believed in Turkey that President Gürsel, a former senior general and former chief of the Committee of National Unity, acted as mediator. Gürsel's motive was, presumably, realization that the Justice party did in fact represent the aspirations of a large number of Turks, as well as his own personal distaste for İsmet İnönü. Whatever the facts, Demirel has continued to have an excellent relationship with Gürsel's successor, former chief of the Turkish General Staff, Cevdet Sunay. Sunay, elected by both houses of the parliament with the support of both major parties, has apparently given his approval to Demirel. As a highly respected former soldier, he is in a position to assure at least the neutrality of the senior military officers and to act as their spokesman within the government

when necessary. Thus Demirel's "military problem" is solved for the present, although many middle- and lower-grade officers have reservations about his government.⁷

THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE FUTURE

Many middle- and lower-grade officers and Turkish intellectuals, in particular, view the Justice party's posture of listening to the peasants, rather than instructing them, as virtually treason to the principles of Atatürk. Long wedded to the idea of induced change from above, they have been slow to grasp the fact that, as a result of the very success of the Atatürk revolution, Turkey is moving into an era in which change and reform are likely to be more and more organic. The day of the tutelary regime à la Atatürk, necessary as it once was, is past for most Turks. Therefore, the Atatürkian rhetoric in the pronouncements of many leaders of the Republican People's party has little meaning in today's Turkey. Deluded by its own rhetoric and still determinedly elitist in outlook, that party is not today an effective political opposition. Rather, it has been reduced to sterile obstruction in the parliament and a pettish insistence on its right to rule.

Many intellectuals, discouraged over the prospects of the Republican People's party's ever coming to power by elections, are increasingly drawn toward authoritarian ideas—ideas that they label progressive, but that look suspiciously reactionary to an outsider. Some intellectuals are attracted by the small Labor party, which, although nineteenth-century by European socialist standards, at least seems to be looking for new approaches. Others are hoping that the emergence of a "left of center" group within the Republican People's party signals a break with older traditions and a more realistic approach to modern political competition.⁸ This seems doubtful. Neither the Labor party nor the Republican "left of center" has yet demonstrated the ability to communicate with the masses. Their political innovations to date have consisted of appropriating a leftist (chiefly French socialist) political vocabulary and grafting it on to Atatürkism. Their greatest successes have come when they have been most old-fashionedly nationalistic and xenophobic—stridently anti-American in the current Turkish context.

⁷ See George S. Harris, "The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics," *Middle East Journal*, xix (Winter 1965 and Spring 1965), 54-66, 169-76.

⁸ Since this article was written, the Republican People's party has split. Forty-four deputies, representing the party's more conservative and traditional elements and led by Turhan Feyzioglu, have resigned and formed the Güven party. The city intellectual-bureaucrat element, calling itself "left of center," has remained. İsmet İnönü remains party leader, but real leadership is for the most part exercised by Bülent Ecevit.

Although both groups have aroused some enthusiasm among city intellectuals, they have left the broad mass of the Turkish people untouched and unmoved. They have not convinced the majority of the villagers and workers that they are talking about real problems, much less offering solutions to those problems.

Therefore, although he is not likely to lose elections anytime soon, Prime Minister Demirel is faced with important political problems. He must not only make concrete progress toward solving the problems of poverty and economic development, but he must somehow draw Turkish intellectuals back into the political dialogue, for he needs their help in modernizing Turkey. Although his government has performed ably, it is yet to be demonstrated that the Justice party can rule Turkey successfully with the overwhelming majority of the Turkish elite in defiant opposition.

The future for Turkey, although partially cloudy, is nonetheless on the whole encouraging. The country is rapidly changing from a closed, narrow society dominated by a relatively small elite into an open society, in which many groups compete for and share political and economic power. The verdict of history is not yet in, but twenty-five years hence it may be that Demirel and his followers, with their ability to communicate with Turkey's long-muted nonelite groups, will have played the part of the Jacksonians in Turkish development.

Their success to date has come not only because they are attuned to the desire for economic and social betterment on the part of Turkey's long submerged peasants, but also because they have had the advantage of a series of existing institutions, built for the most part by the intellectuals, the military, and the bureaucrats now so out of sympathy with them. Although highly imperfect, these institutions work. For example, the Constitution of 1960, to which no present member of the Justice party contributed, is sufficient. Although far from perfect it is usable. Similarly, the Grand National Assembly does function as an operating parliamentary body. One of the significant developments of recent years has been the slow transfer of real political power in Turkey from the military and bureaucratic establishment to the parliament. Although the process is not yet completed, anyone who doubts that it is happening has simply not observed closely the workings of the government of Turkey in recent years.

Examples of other working institutions are the government ministries, the armed forces, the country's Islamic substructure, the various economic organizations, such as the banks and the chambers of commerce, and the massive educational structure. Ironically, it is the last

which is in most need of reform and which is most impervious to change. Turkey's modern schools and universities are basically the offspring of the old *medrese* system⁹ crossed with the nineteenth-century French. Somehow the Turks have managed to get the worst of both educational worlds. Their schools are devoted to learning by rote a body of knowledge or doctrine handed down from above and are firmly opposed to independent thought and inquiry.

In short, many serious problems face Turkey's new Jacksonians. They must fulfill their promise to the peasants, maintain their accommodation with the army, convert Turkey's rigid institutions from instruments of control (as befits their Ottoman heritage) to creative instruments of economic development, and induce Turkish intellectuals to contribute constructively to the solution of national problems. This is a massive prescription. The success of Demirel and the Justice party in filling it has great significance not only for the future of democracy in Turkey, but for its future in the entire underdeveloped world.

⁹ Traditional Islamic theological schools in which the scholars memorized the Koran.