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## Parliament Membership during the Single-Party System in Turkey (1925-1945)

Cemil Koçak

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## **Parliament Membership during the Single-Party System in Turkey (1925-1945)**

Cemil Koçak

**Abstract.** The official legitimization of the single-party regime in Turkey lay with Parliament, which, as a representative of the people, controlled the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. However, the parliamentary period after 1925 was highlighted by a lack of freedom of speech, with scope for political discussion limited. This paper aims to establish the role of MPs during this period. At the head of the single-party system, the President was free to choose every party member for Parliament. This meant competition was very restricted, be it in the form of short-lived opposition parties or independent candidates. During the selection process, some social classes, for example high-ranking officer and bureaucrats were privileged. These two groups were the most common in Parliament. On the other hand, local ties were sometimes respected by the regime: rural notables with close relations with party headquarters were easily elected, and remained in Parliament. A MPs' chance of re-election was significant if he performed his duty with loyalty to the party. The author underlines a stabilization of political personnel throughout this period.

The single-party regime in Turkey was established de facto in 1925, and remained throughout the second World War, ending at the end of 1945. It is obvious that, during this period, the role of a member of parliament (MP) was very different in comparison with the following terms. The role of an MP in Turkey during the single-party system was both easy yet extremely difficult. This situation can only be explained by analyzing the 'chiefhood' (*şeflik*) system. The 1924 Constitution called for the creation of a representative political system, according to which society would be able to express its political views and preferences. This was a consequence of a free, egalitarian electoral system based on general ballot. The government was to be taken from Parliament and would only act under its control. The Parliament had the right to select and control both the government and the Prime Minister. The Parliament also had the role of nominating the President. As an organ equipped with legislative power, it was also authorised to control the executive and, if necessary, act as an organ of scrutiny. However, in reality, the country's political system worked in precisely the inverse manner, based on another mechanism visible neither in the Constitution nor in the election law.

## I The elections

### The legal cadre

[2] As the Turkish Republic is drawn from the Ottoman State, it serves no purpose to attempt an analysis of the legal norms and practices of Republican Turkey without a knowledge of the Ottoman Constitution and laws. Immediately after the enactment of the 1876 Constitution, an election for the House of Representatives was held<sup>1</sup>. According to a temporary arrangement, elections were to be conducted in compliance with a two-phased, simple majority system. 80 Moslem and 50 non-Moslem representatives were to be elected. The number of representatives to be elected from each province was determined. The age of electoral eligibility was set as 25, despite a clear, contradicting statement in the Constitution to this effect. In order to be a representative, some conditions were added, such as the knowledge of the Turkish language, being from the constituency from which you

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Constitution stipulated that a special bill be enacted for this purpose. However, since the same Constitution stipulated that the House of Representatives be formed before a bill could be enacted, a temporary arrangement was accepted and declared together with the Constitution.

were to be elected, being trustworthy and owning at least some property. The Ottoman State was divided into two parts for the elections. Accordingly, Istanbul formed an electoral region of 20 sections. Five Moslem and five non-Moslem representatives were to be elected from Istanbul. The primary electors (*müntehibi evvel*) were to elect two secondary electors (*müntehibi sani*) from each section and thus, 40 secondary electors would elect the representatives. Elections were also to be held in rural centres, though in these areas, a separate election for secondary electors was not to be held; those elected to local Parliaments were accepted as secondary electors, who were to elect the representatives. Women had no right to vote or stand for election. During the period of the First Constitutional Monarchy, two elections were to be held, in 1877 and again in 1878.

[3] Upon the call of Atatürk, the lower house of the last Ottoman parliament (*heyeti mebusan*), which had previously assembled in Istanbul, convened on 23 April 1920 in Ankara. The sole justification for this was necessity, as Istanbul was under foreign occupation. Furthermore, the Parliament had decided to use the example of the French Revolution as a model. The MPs assembled in Ankara were the same as those in Istanbul. However, this assembly differed from that of the Ottoman parliament. Some members of the Ottoman parliament never came to Ankara. One group of MPs came immediately, while another group took some time to arrive. After some time, the Parliament in Ankara announced that those who did not come to Ankara would no longer be considered MPs. Since the number of MPs who did arrive in Ankara was small, by-elections were held. Elections could in theory be held in those regions not under occupation. However, in many regions, elections either took a long time to be held, or did not take place at all. For those regions where elections did not take place, MPs were selected and appointed from those either from Ankara or the region concerned. This meant that 'elections' were not so much 'elections' in the ordinary sense, but rather an assignment system aimed at legitimising the formation of a Parliament as a representative of the people. Although the precise number of MPs in this parliament is still a matter of debate among historians, it can be deduced that there was approximately 350 MPs within this three-year period.

[4] The elections prior to the establishment of the Republic were held in 1923 and conducted in conformity with the electoral law of 1877, a product of the Ottoman period. Accordingly, in 1923 one MP was to be elected for every 20,000 men. Every male over 18 now had the right to vote; the

condition of having to pay an electoral tax had essentially been lifted. In order to be elected, one had to be a male member of the people of the Turkish State and over 30 years of age. However, parliamentary elections were still held in two rounds as was the case during the Ottoman period, and a second 'voter' was to be elected for every 200 people (Demirel 1994: 511-531).

[5] What was the ruling party's position concerning the elections? For the first time, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party - CHP) was to decipher a political program during its 1931 congress, i.e. eight years after its establishment. Until then, despite the fact that opposition parties had twice been set up against the CHP, this party had never announced a political program. According to this first program, single-round elections were accepted as a principle. However, it was decided that until the voters gained sufficient political, social and cultural knowledge enabling them to make an informed decision, it would be more appropriate and conform with the idea of democracy to select the secondary voters, whom they knew closely and trusted. Until the citizens were given the necessary education and reached the high standards desired, the ruling party would continue to use the two-round election system stemming from the Ottoman period. An important aspect of the program was its aim to give women the vote, as well as the possibility to become MPs (CHP Programı 1931: art. 4).

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[6] The 1935 election was the first to be held after women were given the right to vote and be elected as MPs. This process had also given women the chance to join the ruling party as members and to be elected as 'second round voters'. For the first time, 18 women were elected as MPs - they were 14 in the next elections, in 1939. Besides, the legal age for voting was raised from 18 to 22. There was yet another aspect in these elections. For the first time in Republican history – including the period of the national resistance movement (*milli mücadele*) - members of minority groups were put forward as candidates, in order for the communities of the non-Muslim minority to be represented too, as had been the tradition of the Ottoman parliament. The party in power selected these candidates. Thus, Greek-Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian Gregorian candidates were given the opportunity to be elected as MPs. The system of calculating one MP per 40,000 citizens was put into force. One 'second round voter' was to be elected for 400 'primary' voters. A few weeks later, at the CHP Congress of 1935, a new party program was accepted. It included a provision to change the electoral law, itself a product of the Ottoman period, which, save for a few exceptions, was still being implemented. However, the idea that two-round elections were more in compliance with democracy prevailed (CHP Programı 1935: art. 4/c).

[7] At the end of 1942, the electoral law of the Ottoman period was finally changed. According to new law, one MP per 40,000 persons was to be elected. In order to vote, one had to be a Turkish citizen over the age of 22. For the right to be elected, one had to be over 30 years of age. Again, the elections were held in two rounds. According to the changes made to the CHP statutes in 1943, the need to preserve two-round elections was emphasized. The 1943 elections were the first elections held in accordance with the first election law enacted after the establishment of the Republic. Representatives from non-Moslem communities were again elected – a total of four members.

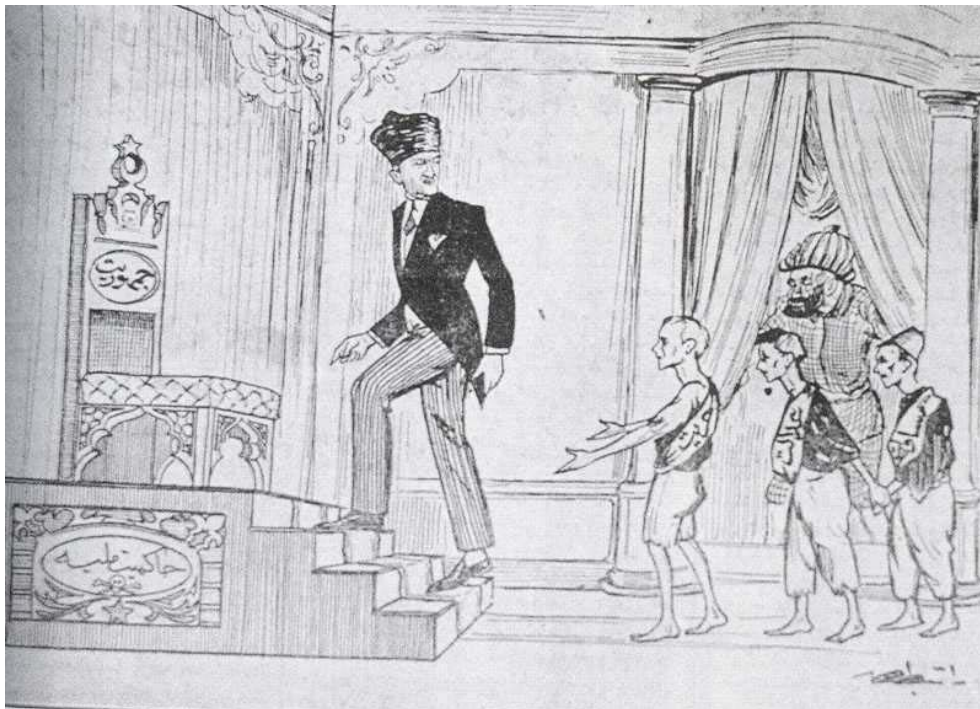
#### **The CHP's choice of candidates**

[8] How were the candidates chosen? They were designated by the People's Party headquarters. Parliamentary elections were not alone in being conducted in this manner. The People's Party selected the candidates in regional elections too, and even the heads of the villages (*muhtar*) were elected in this way. There could only be exceptions to this rule, in which case the



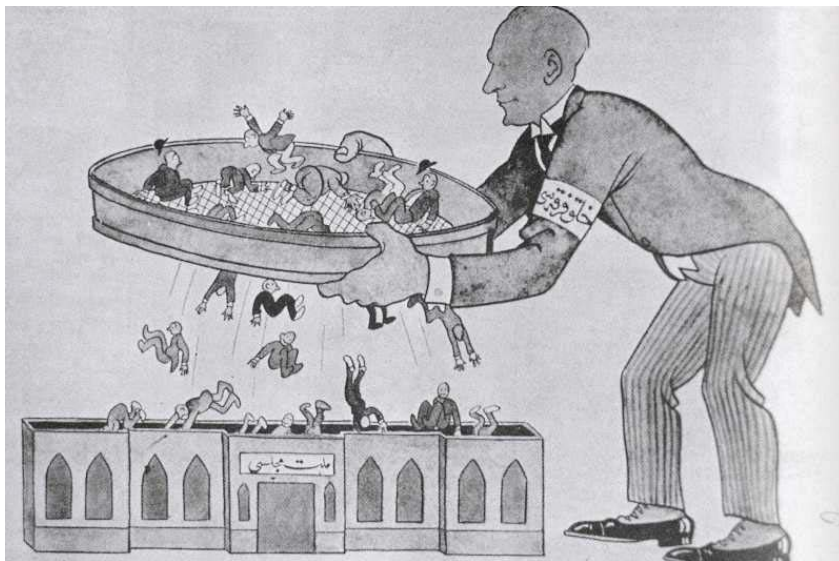
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elections would be renewed. Often, candidates were ignorant of the fact that they were indeed candidates – some learnt of their candidacy through newspapers!





[9] According to the People's Party's statutes of 1923, the entity entitled to determine and announce the party's parliamentary candidates was the party's top level executive committee, after communicating with the regional administrative committees. This committee was composed of the Parliamentary Group executive board members, the government members, the general executive board members and parliamentarians of the party. However, the party leader had a key role in this process. In accordance with the 1924 Constitution, the President was the Head of State with limited authority. However, the President was simultaneously the head of the party. As such, he used his authority not as President, but as head of the party. The People's Party statutes gave the head of the party the authority to make key decisions, including concerning every MP to sit in Parliament. In this respect, an important political development was the congress of the People's Party in 1927, which now has the adjective 'Republican' attached to it. At this congress, party statutes had been dramatically changed. The party's general executive board was now composed of the party's 'Deputy Unchangeable Leader' (*Değişmez Genel Başkan Vekili*) - 'unchangeable' had during this time been added the title 'Leader', and the Secretary General. The head of the party had now also legally become the undisputable Leader of the Party. All members of the party were obliged to comply with all decisions this board would take. It was again this board which would administer parliamentary elections, and was authorised to determine the party's parliamentary candidates. The party leader selected the candidates; thus the party leader had the definitive authority to decide who the MPs would be (Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi 1927: art. 21-23).



[10] For those party members objecting to the decisions of the party headquarters, disciplinary measures were put into place, including expulsion from the party. Nevertheless, there were instances where political competition could cause difficulty, especially in the provincial regions. Various local disagreements, in particular, could cause conflict within the regional organisations of the ruling party, resulting in negative effects on the relations between headquarters and local organisations. However, the party headquarters never hesitated in displaying its power. If there were ever a case of 'weakness', these rebellious groups would be expelled from the party in accordance with the harsh disciplinary rules.

[11] Once a person was a candidate on the CHP candidate list, he would definitely be elected as an MP, even with a single vote. In 1923, the second-round candidates for voting, selected by the People's Party, were presented to the first round voters for election. The first-round voters had no alternative to this list of candidates. Secondary candidates had no choice but to vote for those candidates put forward by the People's Party. It must be noted that they themselves were also members of the People's Party. Party members had to vote for those people whose candidacy was declared by the party. Refusal to vote for the candidates of the party was an offence which resulted in expulsion from the party (Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi 1923: art. 20, 26-27, 101-103). In practice, this system worked flawlessly. As the lists of candidates were being drawn up, in most electoral regions the number of candidates presented did not exceed the number of MPs to be elected from that region. It was therefore guaranteed that all of these people would be elected (Demirel 1994: 584-597, Demirel 1995: 23-27, Uyar 1999: 21-31, Tunçay 1999).



[12] It was therefore important that a candidate be on this list. Therefore, there was neither any need for propaganda nor political competition. The candidate's only duty was to gain the confidence of the party leader. This meant absolute loyalty to the leader, to the regime, to the party and to government. In this sense, a MP's chance of re-election was quite high if he was successful in performing the duty expected of him. If he was seen to be adopting political behaviour, making him unworthy of the leader's trust, a rare scenario, it became impossible for him to be re-elected. There were provisions in the party statutes to the effect that parliamentary candidates could be discussed at the party's authorised committees, but consultation of this type was never regarded as necessary.



[13] There was a turnover of over 60% of parliamentarians as a result of the 1923 elections. This turnover rate dropped significantly to under 40% at the next elections (Frey 1965: 164). As for following elections, only less than one third of the Parliament was 'renewed'. In the 1935 elections, the 'renewal' rate was close to one fifth. Under normal conditions, if parliament had had the chance to witness a complete turnover, the number of parliamentarians for all six terms would have been close to 2,500. However, there were barely over 1,000 parliamentarians in these six years (Öz 1992, Uyar 1998, Tunçay 1999, Demirel 2003: 584-598, Koçak 2003).

[14] In the statutes of the CHP accepted in 1931, there was no arrangement differing from the previous one. The mechanism through which the party announced its candidates in parliamentary elections had not been altered. The candidates, selected directly from headquarters, were guaranteed to succeed in the elections. However, in order to demonstrate the closeness of the regime to the people, special measures were taken to enable, in particular labourers from mining regions and peasants from rural areas, to sit in Parliament as MPs. Naturally, these candidates were still being chosen by headquarters and were only symbolically being added to the list of candidates. For the 1931 elections, the party demanded that the Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (of which headquarters was in İzmir), General Fahrettin Altay, find a candidate who was a peasant. This peasant candidate, whom Mustafa Kemal personally demanded be found, was expected to own some land. Furthermore, after this candidate was elected, he was not permitted to change his previous lifestyle and was to continue to live as a peasant. Except for being an MP, he was to spend



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his life in his village on his land. He was to have a nationalistic worldview and was to be totally isolated from any type of internationalist thought. He was to be faithful to the principles of the ruling party, to participate in parliamentary meetings in his peasant's attire, but was to dress as was necessary only for official ceremonies. It sufficed that he could read and write a little, though he wasn't to be too old. He was expected to be intelligent, extrovert and to have common sense. There was to be no debate concerning his past, and he was to be loved and respected by his peers. If the candidate had been a member of the CHP before, this worked to his advantage, but was not incredibly significant. It sufficed that he had no disagreements with the party in the past. If these conditions were fulfilled, he was expected to become a party member. Indeed, a peasant candidate fulfilling these conditions was found in a very short time and the selected candidate served as MP for two terms – a total of eight years (Uyar 1999: 25-26, Tunçay 1999)!

[15] The process for determining the parliamentary candidates was not changed in the party statutes of 1935 – nor was there any change in the statutes concerning the Party's Parliamentary Group (CHP Tüzüğü 1935: art. 24-28, 81-111). However, in comparison with previous elections, the 1939 elections had a distinctive feature. Prior to the announcement of the party's candidates for MP, consultations were made with the second-round voters, also selected from the party list, and a meeting was organised for this purpose. Although it cannot be established whether this consultation had any influence on the list of candidates, nevertheless, this was the first time that an exchange of opinion was occurring at all.

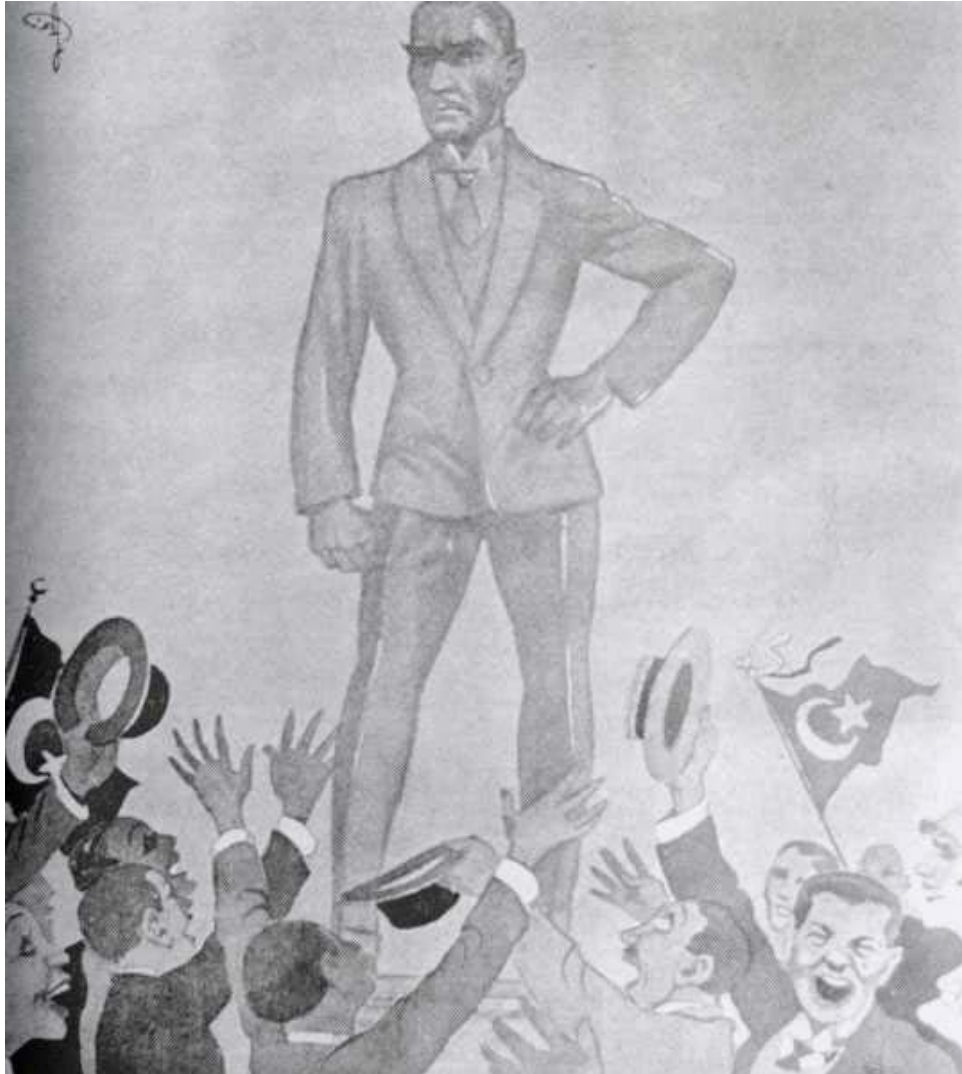


### **Competition?**

[16] In these circumstances, was there any electoral competition? We will deal first with the opposition parties and then with independent candidates. Prior to the 1923 elections, Mustafa Kemal had announced that he would form a new political party based on the 'First Group' which had been formed within the First Parliament. The candidates of this group, whose leadership Mustafa Kemal took up after a brief political declaration, eliminated the candidates of the Second Group – their rivals – and entered the new parliament. Only one member of the Second Group had succeeded in being re-elected; thus, there was no further opposition in Parliament against the Kemalist rule. In fact, many of the Second Group MPs had not become candidates in these elections; 16 of them had attempted to become independent MPs from Istanbul, though with no success. The Halk Fırkası (People's Party) was formed after the elections and except for one, all MPs were members of this party.

[17] As a consequence of the differences of opinion within the single party, one group of opponents formed a new political party, the 'Progressive Republican Party' (Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası) in 1925. However, the first opposition party was closed down very quickly and never had the opportunity to stand in any elections. The second one, the liberal and liberalistic Free Republican Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Partisi), established in 1930 as an opposition party upon the request of the government, was not able either to find the opportunity to participate in any parliamentary election due to its short life span (Yetkin 1982). However, it had the chance to take part in municipal elections. In these elections, the opposition party achieved fairly important success and thus was able to demonstrate to everyone the power of the political opposition in the country, including the government (Emrence 2000). It became clear, therefore, that the success enjoyed by the ruling party in the elections of the past two terms, with no present opposition, was not real.





[18] The liberal political competition in the country had come to a total end from 1925, and the participation rate in the elections in 1927 was only 23 %, the election with the lowest participation rate among almost all of the elections of this country until the present. As party leader, Atatürk had personally selected the MP candidates. He had thus made it clear that he preferred the MPs to be persons of his own choice, and furthermore that he expected everyone's compliance in this matter. Although a few people did stand as 'independent' candidates, outside of this official list of candidates, these people did not succeed in being elected (Uyar 1999: 25, Tunçay 1999).

[19] Yet, in various elections held after 1923, independent candidates succeeded in being elected as MPs. However, these cases have always been exceptional (Demirel 1994: 571-606). In

parliamentary elections it was possible, in theory, to select an independent candidate not included in the CHP list, even as an opponent to the CHP. However, such an act would be considered 'politically courageous' at the most. Though very rare, there have been some such examples during the first elections held in the Republic. However, such tactics never yielded any real results. Sometimes these initiatives would result in the candidates' withdrawal of their candidacy – but there was no need for this. In any case, it was almost impossible for them to receive a single vote when they had to compete with the CHP member second-round voters.

[20] In the 1931 elections however, independent candidates featured on the CHP list. The fact that only some of these candidates were elected shows that the second round voters were more 'partisan' than headquarters, as they refused to vote for the independent candidates, although these were nominated by the party. In these elections, among the independent candidates, we can note the names of people who constituted the opposition. For example candidates included Refet Bele and General Kâzım Karabekir, one of the leaders of the war of independence and head of the Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Partisi dissolved in 1925, and Arif Oruç, supporting the Serbest Cumhuriyet Partisi in 1930. However, they would not be elected. After these elections, General Ali Fuat Cebesoy, another leader of the war of independence and Secretary General of the Progressive Republican Party, was made an MP by Mustafa Kemal personally in 1933.

[21] In 1935, 13 independent candidates had succeeded in entering Parliament, as in the previous elections. This time, Refet Bele was among these members. However, although Hüseyin Avni Ulaş, the leader of the Second Group (which had opposed Mustafa Kemal in the first Parliament), competed as an independent candidate, he did not succeed at the elections. This therefore demonstrated that real opponents still did not have the chance to win (Uyar 1998).

[22] The 1939 elections are the first elections following Atatürk's death and İnönü's election as President, and are therefore politically significant in some ways. Approximately a year prior to Atatürk's death, in 1937, the differences of opinion between President Atatürk and Prime Minister İnönü in matters relating to politics, economy and foreign policy had deepened, and had resulted in the Prime Minister's departure from office. Celal Bayar, who had been Minister of Economy of the İnönü government, had replaced İnönü. During this period, many attempts were made to prevent İsmet İnönü's return to political life after Atatürk's imminent death, but could not prevent İnönü's

election as President towards the end of 1938. İnönü implemented a 'dual' strategy during these elections. As Leader of the Party, he finally possessed the authority to select the MP candidates. Firstly, he prevented those MPs not sharing his beliefs being re-elected to Parliament. By the same token, all of his former peers who, due to political disagreements with Atatürk had been forced to withdraw from parliamentary and political life, returned to Parliament. As a consequence, Kazım Karabekir and Rauf Orbay were re-elected to Parliament (Koçak 2003 vol. I: 139-224, vol. II: 13-140).

[23] In 1943, as in the previous elections, independent candidates featured on the party candidates' list, though through the party list system these elections differ from the previous ones (Uyar 1998, Koçak 2003). In addition, as the party left some vacancies on the list of candidates, sixteen independent candidates were able to sit in Parliament this time, which was also the case for previous elections. Furthermore, at the 1943 elections, the CHP nominated more candidates than the number of MPs to be elected from a certain constituency, and thus provided a means for these candidates to compete for.

## **II Life in the Parliament**

### **The first Assembly**

[24] In Turkish parliamentary and political history, the 1920 parliament is referred to as the 'First Assembly'. It had distinguished characteristics, both in terms of the composition of its members, as well as its working conditions and the free debates it hosted – so much so that the assertion that this assembly has been the most democratic and participatory assembly until 1950 is, to a large extent, true. A 'spirit' that was never to be felt during the single-party period was strongly prevalent in this Parliament, which represented a large part of society. Every reform proposal was put forward to the Parliament. Although the members were not directly the 'people' themselves, but had only come from *among* the 'people', they nevertheless had a strong 'representational' ability. On the other hand, the freedom of expression of ideas and the discussions within parliament were a high level never to be noted again in following years. During this term, elections were held only once, and at the end of three years – a short period of time – MPs announced that they had fulfilled their duty, and dissolved the assembly on 23 April 1922, in order for new elections to be held. This decision should be accepted as an indicator of political maturity, as according to the Constitution, if the members had

wished, they could have continued as MPs without being constrained by any time limitations (Demirel 1994, Koçak 1998, Tunçay 1999).

[25] It may be useful to recall some important characteristics of the first parliament: firstly, unlike the Ottoman parliament, political parties or members of political parties never sat in this parliament. Members were affiliated not to parties, but to political groups. No legal statutes had been designed for these political groups, and group discipline was generally lax. Often, members would shift from one group to another – in fact, this tendency was quite frequent. Generally the balance of powers would be re-established according to the issue being debated. On the one hand was the 'First Group' with its Jacobin tendencies, generally supporting Mustafa Kemal and his close friends; on the other hand was the 'Second Group' movement which made its mark upon the political conflicts in this parliament against the First Group - liberal and liberalistic, but at the same time, extremely conservative. Secondly, further in contrast with the Ottoman parliaments, there was no Christian member in Parliament. Therefore, exclusively Muslim - but not exclusively Turkish - members sat in parliament. This was the first instance where representatives of non-Muslim communities were excluded from parliament.

[26] Yet another characteristic of this parliament was the fact that, contrary to the classical parliamentary concept of separation of powers, which constituted one of the principles of the Ottoman constitutional system, this parliament adopted a system closer to that of the French Revolution, calling for just the inverse of the separation of powers principle. This parliament regarded the 'superiority of parliament' principle as a symbol that sovereignty belonged to the nation. Everything was to start with and within parliament and was to terminate with and within parliament. No other power or sovereignty would be accepted. The parliament was a direct representative of the people and pursued the people's rule. In a way, this resembled the Bolshevik slogan 'All power to the Soviets' in Russia during the October 1917 Revolution. The 'superiority of parliament' principle stipulated that the legislative, executive and judiciary belonged to Parliament. In other words, Parliament was authorised not only to make laws, but also supervise and control the government, which was in fact its own product and which it could oust any time, in order to form extraordinary courts and appoint its own members as judges of these courts. The government served as an executive agent of the parliament. The Constitution adopted in 1924 was the first adopted after the

establishment of the Republic, and reflected a balance of the separation of powers system and a 'union of powers'. Although there was now a move away from the 'government of the Parliament' system, the Parliament's sovereignty still remained. The Parliament continued to hold the legislature and the executive and also kept its power over the government.

[27] However, it would be wrong to conclude, purely based on this analysis, that the second parliament was much different from the first. On the contrary, although the MPs of the second parliament were all members of the same party, this did not exclude heated discussions and conflicts, as there existed deep differences of opinion within the People's Party. Although being members of the same party, these MPs pursued very different political goals. This naturally provoked political struggle within the party and, as a consequence within the parliament. During this period, it was possible to continue this struggle freely and within the framework of democratic rules.



### **The vanishing freedom of speech**

[28] According to the 1924 Constitution, MPs were free to express their ideas in Parliament, and also in their votes. What they spoke within Parliament could be repeated outside it and these members would not be held responsible. They continued to enjoy political immunity. They could be judged for certain crimes, though they could be judged at a special court only with the vote of two thirds of all MPs (Gözübüyük, Kili 1982: 111-136).

[29] Some dispositions of the People's Party 1923 statutes concerned the party's Parliamentary Group and therefore party discipline. The head of the party was also to be the head of its Parliamentary Group. The group was to elect an executive board from among its own members, and every topic could be discussed in the group. All members had to abide by the decisions of the group. During parliamentary sessions, group members were obliged to vote in accordance with the party's decisions. Those members who violated these rules could be penalised in various ways, the most drastic being expulsion from the party. However, in matters where no group decision was taken, members were free to vote according to their own views. Furthermore, during the group meetings, group members had the right to freely express their opinions (Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi 1923: art. 83-100).

[30] In principle, unrestricted communication was possible both in Parliament and at the CHP Parliamentary Group. However, after 1925, this freedom remained on paper. The MPs within the CHP Parliamentary Group accepted the path the party executive wanted them to take, sometimes with politely formulated criticism or wishes. These same members would legalise these decisions in Parliament. This politely formulated criticism would never be voiced in Parliament. At times, politely formulated suggestions were made, though these were not important issues. Parliamentary speeches were only of a complimentary kind. Sometimes there would be very rare cases of criticism within the Parliamentary Group, or fewer ones in Parliament itself, that could be described as 'daring'. In such cases, the relevant members would find themselves thrown out of Parliament at the next elections. This always set, or was hoped to set, an example for the others.



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[31] This evolution also appears in the CHP statutes. The CHP Congress of 1927 laid down new rules for members of the Party's Parliamentary Group. A decision of the party group was made necessary in order to ask the government a question in Parliament. Party members could not express any opinion against the Party (Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi 1927: art. 92-123).



### **Experiments in parliamentary opposition**

[32] Some very important political developments took place between 1923 and 1927 in terms of opposition. Initially, only one party existed (the People's Party) in Parliament, formed after the 1923 elections. However, as a consequence of the differences of opinion, one group of opponents broke off and created the Progressive Republican Party. Yet, this opposition was short-lived. The Kurdish revolt of 1925 brought an end to this party, as well as to all opposing organisations, media, and the freedom of expression of all divergent ideas. The special courts established at this time played a role in the suppression of opposition of any kind.

[33] The most important development of this period in terms of parliamentary control was the formation of the CHP Independent Group. In accordance with the statutes passed at the CHP congress of 1939, new arrangements were made regarding this issue, according to which the CHP congress selected 21 members from among the CHP parliamentarians. These members formed the above-mentioned Independent Group. The members of this Group attended the Parliamentary Group meetings of the CHP – their 'actual' party – but were neither able to express their opinion nor participate in the voting. The parliamentarians who were members of the Independent Group had the right to freely voice their opinions, join discussions and vote for a decision only within their own Parliamentary Group. The same applied to parliamentary meetings where members were able to express their views freely and vote in accordance with their group decision. They could not become members of the government. The CHP Leader personally appointed the head of the Independent Group. According to the statutes, it was the duty of the Independent Group to remain outside the control of the CHP Parliamentary Group, and control government activities. Another duty of the Independent Group was to contribute to the success of the government. However, the necessary political and legal framework for this had not been set up. The members of the Independent Group had no influence on the decisions taken at the CHP Parliamentary group meetings, because they neither had the right to express their views nor possessed the right to vote. Yet it was at these meetings that the decisions to be taken at Parliament were being finalised and, in any case, according to the CHP statutes, no MP who was a CHP member could express any opinion against this decision or vote against this decision. In this case, disciplinary judgements would be enforced and the relevant member or members could even be dismissed from the party. Thus, no matter how

persuasive, the views, suggestions or proposals of the members of the Independent Group brought forward at Parliament could have no effect on the final decisions.

[34] The Independent Group continued within the CHP from 1939 to 1946 until the change of regime took place. However, this experiment did not yield significant results. On the contrary, the Independent Group, rather than be independent, was more in support of the CHP than many of the CHP member parliamentarians themselves! Even if the Independent Group did on occasion criticise the activities of the government in an extremely polite way, it never voted against the government, or even cast a vote of abstention – it supported the government unconditionally. However in the CHP's closed Parliamentary Group meetings, as far as we know, many parliamentarians gained the opportunity to criticise the government in a much harsher manner (Uyar 1998, Koçak 2003 vol. II: 72-82).

### **III Social profile of MPs**

#### **The cursus honorum**

[35] Who were the MPs in this period? The MPs constituted not only the political elite of the period, but also the social and administrative elite. From time to time, some parliamentarians would quit parliament in order to become an Ambassador or Governor. This demonstrated that those who worked in the public service with deep loyalty to the regime could return to their former duties, if they wished – for being a parliamentarian was, in a way, similar to being in the public service. During the 1927 congress of the people's Party, measures were taken to prevent corruption by MPs through their usage of their titles – they were banned from taking up high-profile positions in public institutions (Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi 1927: art. 92-123).

[36] These parliamentarians who had additionally become member of government formed an even narrower group, as there was rarely a turnover here (Frey 1965: 269-300). In fact, we see that some members of government never changed. They constituted the highest echelon of the regime and the political elite. It must be noted that there was a certain hierarchy amongst the parliamentarians themselves. Taking part in the important organs and in important positions of the ruling party or of Parliament was an indicator of one's status. Naturally, holding an office in

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government or being in closer connection with the government was also prestigious. But the real power lay in having direct access to the Prime Minister or to the President. These were the persons who formed the very top layer of the elite. Only a small minority possessed the opportunity to enjoy this level and become a member of this group, which comprised the actual power.

**Table: Occupations of Newly Elected Deputies by Assembly (Percentages)**

	1(1920)	2(1923)	3(1927)	4(1931)	5(1935)	6(1939)	7(1943)
Government	23	23	23	7	15	12	14
Military	15	19	23	8	18	12	9
Education	5	9	11	8	15	14	15
(Official)	43	52	57	23	47	38	38
Law	13	16	9	17	9	13	24
Medicine	4	6	7	5	14	13	12
Dentist, Phar. & Vet. Med	1	-	2	2	5	3	2
Engineering	-	2	2	4	1	2	4
(Professional)	25	20	28	29	30	42	
Trade	12	6	9	20	10	15	5
Agriculture	6	5	7	21	8	7	8
Banking	1	1	2	-	3	3	3
(Economic)	19	12	17	41	21	25	16
Religion	17	27	2	-	-	-	-
Journalism	2	5	5	7	1	6	3
Other	2	-	-	-	-	1	1
Unknown	15	18	-	2	1	-	-

Source: Frey (1965: 210)

### **The local dimension**

[37] To what degree did parliamentarians represent their region? The answer to this question is two-fold: the first response is that some parliamentarians had neither been to the region they were elected from, nor visited this region as MPs. It was not uncommon for those who became MPs to hear about this either through the newspapers or through radio news just as the rest of society. It would be very hard to state that these parliamentarians really did represent 'their' regions. From time to time some were re-elected from entirely different regions (Frey 1965: 100-103). By contrast, there were also parliamentarians who were born in and had grown up in the region from which they were elected. These had a certain kind of relationship to it, for they were classed as the 'wealthy' of the

region. That is to say, if we answer the question from a political standpoint, we can state that generally the economically and socially powerful people in the region would become parliamentarians. There was no possibility for a representative from a rural area to represent the People. Especially in areas of the country where a feudal agricultural structure prevailed, wealthy landowners were consistently sitting in Parliament as MPs. In particular, the leaders of the Kurdish clans in the Eastern and South-eastern areas, who had positive and close relations with headquarters, easily entered and were able to remain in Parliament ([Dorransoro 2005](#)).

[38] Other than this group, one had to be from the army or from civilian bureaucracy to become an MP. Bureaucrats who had reached the higher echelons in state administration were generally rewarded after their retirement by being appointed MPs. High rank, retired army members entered Parliament in the same manner. These two formed the most crowded group in Parliament. According to Frey's study, the proportion of group in the Parliaments of the single-party period, ranged from 23% to 57%. The number and proportion of parliamentarians who were self-employed, as well as tradesmen and industrialists from the 'private enterprise' were much lower. According to Frey, throughout this period this rate ranged between 12% and 42% for the self-employed, and between 12% and 41% for those from the 'private enterprise' (Frey 1965: 181). Concerning the self-employed, it is interesting to note that their rate was lower at the beginning of the period, but reached its peak toward the end of the term. Excluding the First Parliament, it was exceptional for a man whose main profession involved religion to become an MP. Another practice was the rewarding of the country's forthcoming artists, writers, and poets by appointing them MPs. However, this applied only to those who were at the service of the regime ([Günay 2005](#)). Journalists also had access to Parliament as MPs, but again, this depended on whether or not they had represented the CHP and had supported the CHP in the media. Thus control over the press was being further increased. Journalists were supposed to be foremost spokesmen of the regime.

### **The MP and social groups**

[39] Society's contact with the MPs was either very weak or non-existent. There were no means to directly address them, and it would be an exaggeration to state that the MPs cared about being in close touch with the public. Obedience to the authority was the foremost expectation the



regime had of society. All of the agents of the state and of the government and all parliamentarians were visible symbols of this authority.

[40] It was impossible for the public to attend the parliamentarians' activities, as parliamentary sessions were open to the public in theory only. In reality, the press was not allowed to attend and publicise parliamentary sessions. The only kind of parliamentary news that could feature in the media was the information compiled by the state's official news agency, and this was exclusive. Therefore the propaganda of the regime was evident here, too.

[41] As for those persons who had become parliamentarians as representatives of non-Moslem minorities, they were well known for their loyalty to the leader and the regime. Indeed, one could hardly say that they really represented the communities of which they were members. On the contrary, in fact, their mission was to inform their communities of what the regime expected from minorities. They were forced to act in a manner more 'Turkish' than the Turkish parliamentarians themselves. However, they were more than willing to do this, and indeed did, as this was what their status as parliamentarians depended on.

[42] The female parliamentarians enjoyed the status of being exemplary to other women in society. They were well educated, and had succeeded in reaching important positions in public life. They were also considered to have the duty of being a good mother and a good wife. All Turkish women had to eventually achieve a level of excellence – this was what was expected of them.

## **Conclusion**

[43] It must be stated that this period witnessed many changes. The system was always forced to refer back to a certain democratic tradition of the previous period. However, in practice, similar to almost all contemporary single-party regimes, there was no great need for Parliament in Turkey. Nevertheless, the sole legal basis for the legitimacy of the regime remained the Parliament. All political decisions emerged from Parliament, which, on paper, created the image of a representative organ – this was the prerequisite of political legitimacy.

[44] In the following term, highlighted by the transition to a political system allowing once again competition between parties (as a result of the change of regime in Turkey after World War II),

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this was all to become history. Although it cannot be claimed that the 1946 elections held in Turkey were flawless, the parliamentary elections of 1950 were able to cause a change of power. The regime can be considered as having proved that it had veritably changed. The subsequent parliaments and their members framed a very different type of structure. However, it would be hard to claim that the political culture of the single party period had completely become history. In this sense, long years were to pass before Parliament and political traditions could finally free themselves of the characteristics of the previous period and regime of which they were products.

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