The republic and the caliphate

As we have seen, Mustafa Kemal Pasha had started to consolidate his political position even before the independence war had formally come to an end with the signing and ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne. The means he had employed were: a change in the High Treason Law; the dissolution of the assembly and tightly controlled elections; the creation of a new party, the People's Party, and the takeover by this party of the whole Defence of Rights organization. This process of consolidation, of gathering power in the hands of Mustafa Kemal and an assembly and party which were both under his complete control, continued after the coming of peace.

The exact nature of the emerging new Turkish state was still somewhat indeterminate at this time. The Ottoman sultanate had been abolished nearly a year before. The country was ruled by the national assembly, which elected not only the president but also every minister or rather ‘commissar’ (vekil) directly. The constitutional relationship between the assembly and the caliph, Abdülmecit Efendi, was unclear. The caliphate as conceived in 1922 was a purely religious function, but it was inevitable that many people continued to see the caliph as the head of state, even if only in a ceremonial sense. Furthermore, as caliph, his jurisdiction transcended the boundaries of the Turkish state and - at least in theory - encompassed the whole Muslim world.

In his interviews with the Turkish press in January, Mustafa Kemal had already hinted that he intended to change this confused situation and declare a republic and he reaffirmed this in an interview with a Viennese daily in September. An opportunity arose when, in October,
open letter to the press in which he pleaded for a more influential position for the caliph, and a similar letter was sent both to the prime minister and to the press by two eminent Indian Muslims, Ameer Ali and the Aga Khan, in December. Because of the difficulty of communications with Ankara, the letter was published in Istanbul before it had been delivered to Prime Minister İsmet, something which angered him and his followers in the assembly. It was decided to send an Independence Tribunal to Istanbul to investigate whether Lütfi Fikri or the newspapers had committed treason. The newspaper editors were acquitted but Fikri was sent to jail for five years. All this indicated growing tensions within the People's Party and between Ankara and Istanbul. In February talks between the president and the leading editors of the Istanbul newspapers failed to heal the rift.

Immediately after the opening of the new parliamentary year on 1 March the expected blow fell: the caliphate was abolished and all members of the Ottoman dynasty were ordered out of the country. After extensive discussions, a new republican constitution was adopted in April to replace the old Ottoman constitution of 1876, which had been modified in 1909 and again through the adoption of the ‘Law on Fundamental Organization’ (Teşkilât-i Esasiye Kanunu), the de facto constitution of the resistance movement, by the first assembly in January 1921.

The nationalist movement is split: the establishment of the Progressive Republican Party
All through the winter and spring of 1924, the radical wing of the People's Party led by Mustafa Kemal and İsmet continued to increase the pressure on the smaller moderate group led by Hüseyin Rauf, which had objected to the way in which the republic had been proclaimed. Continued opposition from within the party became stronger and stronger and by late summer it was clear that the minority had no option but to found a separate opposition party. The actual split took place in the context of a debate over the way the government had handled the resettlement of the Muslims from Greece on the possessions of the Greeks who had had to leave, something which had given rise to widespread corruption. When, after a heated debate in the assembly, İsmet asked for a vote of confidence and easily won it, 32 deputies around Hüseyin Rauf left the party and founded the Progressive Republican Party (Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Firkası) on 17 November. The rumour that the new party
would use the adjective 'Republican' led the People's Party to change its name to 'Republican People's Party' (RPP).

When the new party published its manifesto and its programme, it became evident that it was a party in the Western European liberal mould. It stood for secular and nationalist policies, like the majority party, but it clearly opposed its radical, centralist and authoritarian tendencies. Instead it advocated decentralisation, separation of powers and evolutionary rather than revolutionary change. It also had a more liberal economic policy, accepting foreign loans as necessary.

It was clear that the mood in many parts of the country, certainly in the conservative east, in Istanbul and in the areas where resettlement problems were particularly bad (such as the area around Izmir), favoured an opposition party. The leadership of the RPP recognized the danger and took countermeasures. Discipline within the parliamentary party was tightened (deputies being bound to vote in the assembly according to the majority decision in the closed session of the faction), and an accord was reached with a group of conservative representatives from the east. Most importantly, Ismet, who had had a personal feud with Rauf since Lausanne and who was considered an outspoken radical, was replaced by the much more conciliatory Ali Fethi (Okyar) on 21 November. These measures prevented mass desertions from the RPP.

The conciliatory line was only a temporary expedient, however. A number of hardliners, led by Recep (Peker), the interior minister, were put into the cabinet as watchdogs and by the beginning of 1925 it was clear that the radical wing was putting more and more pressure on Fethi to deal with the opposition, which was gradually building up a grass-roots organization in Istanbul and the east. For a time Fethi resisted the pressure, but outside events gave the radical wing its chance.

The Sheikh Sait rebellion and Kurdish nationalism
The event which was used by the hardliners and the president to put an end to political opposition, was the eruption of Kurdish discontent into an armed rebellion to the north of Diyarbakir in February 1925.

Kurdish nationalism was a relative newcomer among the ideologies of the region. The Kurds had always been divided along tribal lines and since the suppression of the Kurdish emirates under Sultan Mahmut II, their society had been increasingly fragmented. Sultan Abdülhamit had exploited the divisions among the Kurds, and at the same time used their martial qualities when he created his Cossack-like Hamidiye regiments out of some (but by no means all) of the tribes after 1891. The Young Turks had abolished the Hamidiye, but law and order problems had soon forced them to reinstate them in the form of a militia. Regiments of this militia fought in the Balkan War and in the First World War.

After the constitutional revolution in 1908, members of the Kurdish elite in the capital had founded the Kürş Te'şviq ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Society for Support and Progress of the Kurds), of which Sait Nursi, the religious reformer, had also been a member. This, however, had social and not political aims and it kept aloof from the mass of the population in the south-east. In 1912 a number of Kurdish students in Istanbul formed Hevi (Hope), a society with a more pronounced nationalist tendency.

During the war, the removal of the Armenian population from the eastern Anatolian provinces left the Kurds masters of the terrain, but this and the collapse of the Russian front also meant that the common enemies of the Kurds and Turks disappeared and that the two communities were left in competition with each other. In 1918, the Kurdistan Te'şviq Cemiyeti (Society for the Raising of Kurdistan) was founded in Istanbul, with branches in Kurdistan itself, both among the Kormanci-speaking majority and among the Zaza-speaking groups to the north-west of Diyarbakir and both among Sunnis and Alevi (Shi'ites).

During the independence war there was one major Kurdish insurrection against the nationalists in the Dersim (now Tunceli) area, led by tribal chiefs who demanded autonomy, but it was easily suppressed. By and large, the Kurds supported the resistance movement, in spite of the efforts of British agents to influence them and in spite of the fact that they were granted autonomy under the Treaty of Sèvres. There were Kurdish representatives at Erzurum and at Sivas and even on the Representative Committee of the nationalists.

Within the new borders of the republic (which, incidentally, in the south-east ran right across traditional pasture areas of the tribes) about 20 per cent of the population was Kurdish, but they were not mentioned in the peace treaty of Lausanne and promises of autonomy made by the nationalist leaders, including Mustafa Kemal himself, during the independence struggle, were forgotten. This was a great disappointment to the Kurdish nationalists. In 1922 former militia officers founded the Azadi (Freedom) society, which held its
first congress in 1924. At that congress, one of the people whose performance drew attention, was Sheikh Sait of Palu, who was very influential among the Zaza tribes.

That a sheikh, a religious leader, exerted great political influence was not at all extraordinary in Kurdistan, where the two great dervish orders of the Kadiriyya and – especially – the Nakşibendiyya were the only organisations which transcended tribal differences. The leaders of these dervish orders were often called in to decide quarrels between different tribes and this gave them prestige, connections and often considerable wealth. Sheikh Sait himself was an influential member of the Nakşibendi order.

Relations between the Kurds and the predominantly Turkish republican government deteriorated in 1924. The abolition of the caliphate removed an important religious symbol which bound the two communities together. At the same time, the nationalist republic, in its efforts to construct a new national consciousness, developed a repressive policy towards the Kurdish identity: the public use of Kurdish and the teaching of Kurdish were prohibited. Influential Kurdish landowners and tribal chiefs were forcibly resettled in the west of the country. The first sign of resistance against these policies was an abortive rebellion by the garrison in Beytüşşebap in the extreme south-east in August 1924.

The great rebellion, planned by the Azadi and Sheikh Sait for May 1925, broke out prematurely when a shooting incident with the gendarmes in the little town of Piran got out of hand on 8 February. Nearly all the Zaza tribes and two large Kormanci tribes took part in the insurrection, but the divisions between the Kurds showed themselves again: the Alevi Kurds fiercely attacked the Sunni insurgents. That they did so is understandable given the dual character of the rebellion. While the leadership was undoubtedly motivated by the desire for an autonomous or even independent Kurdistan, the rank and file acted from religious motives, demanding the restoration of the holy law and the caliphate. The Alevis, as a heterodox community, generally supported the secularist tendencies of the republic against the partisans of the caliphate and the orthodox establishment – for good reason, because prejudice against the Alevis was and is deeply rooted among the Sunnis.

Although at one time they threatened Diyarbakır, the only town the rebels managed to seize was Elazığ and that only for a short time. The government in Ankara took strong countermeasures as soon as the extent of the insurrection became clear. The assembly was informed about the situation on 25 February. The same day, martial law was declared in the eastern provinces for one month and the High Treason Law was amended to include the political use of religion among the treasonable offences. Around this time the prime minister, Fethi, asked the PRP leaders to disband voluntarily. They refused to do so, but the party chairman, Kâzım Karabekir, did support the government policy in the east very emphatically, both in the assembly and in the press.

Meanwhile, the pressure of the hawks within the RPP on Fethi was rising. İsmet had already returned to Ankara and attended the cabinet meetings. On 2 March Fethi lost a vote of confidence by the RPP faction, when Mustafa Kemal himself sided with the hardliners who demanded stronger measures. He resigned and the next day İsmet became prime minister. His first act was to have the assembly pass the Takrir-i Sükün Karumu (Law on the Maintenance of Order). This empowered the government for two years to ban by administrative measure any organization or publication which it considered to cause disturbance to law and order. The law, which was opposed by the PRP as being too elastic, would be in force in the whole country, not only in the south-east. At the same time two independence tribunals were reinstated, one for the eastern provinces and one for the rest of the country.

The Kurdish rebels were now rapidly pushed back into the mountains. The capture on 27 April of Sheikh Sait really marked the end of the rebellion, although small groups continued a guerrilla war all through the summer. In 1926, a new Kurdish insurrection broke out on the slopes of Mount Ararat, which lasted for four years and can be considered a direct sequel to the Sheikh Sait rebellion, but it did not spread. After the rebellion was over, the government through the military authorities and the independence tribunals dealt very harshly with the Kurds. Many of their leaders were executed and large numbers of Kurds, more than 20,000 in all, were deported from the south-east and forcibly settled in the west of the country. From now on, the existence of a separate Kurdish identity was officially denied.

The Law on the Maintenance of Order was not only used to suppress the Kurds, however. Eight of the most important newspapers and periodicals (conservative, liberal and even Marxist) in Istanbul were closed down, as were several provincial papers, leaving the government organs Hakimiyet-i Millîye (National Sovereignty) in
Ankara and Cumhuriyet (Republic) in Istanbul as the only national papers. All the leading journalists from Istanbul were arrested and brought before the Independence Tribunal in the east. Eventually they were released, but they were not allowed to resume their work. With the press out of the way, the Progressive Republican Party was closed down by the government on the advice of the Independence Tribunal on 3 June. According to the tribunal, members of the party had supported the rebellion and tried to exploit religion for political purposes.

Reforms and executions

With complete domination of the political scene assured, Mustafa Kemal and his government embarked on an extensive programme of reforms. There is an interesting parallel here with the second constitutional period, when a movement which had started out as a campaign for the restoration of the constitution had gained power (in 1908), shared that power for a certain period (until 1913) with others in a pluralistic and relatively free environment, and finally had established its own power monopoly, which it used to push through a radical programme of secularization and modernization (1913–18).

The same pattern now repeated itself with a movement for national sovereignty being victorious (1922), going through a pluralistic phase (until 1925) and then establishing an authoritarian regime, which embarked on a programme of reforms. The authoritarian nationalist phases of both the Unionist and the Kemalist eras also witnessed the brutal suppression of minority communities: the Armenians in the first case, the Kurds in the second. This seems to suggest that in both these phases of the Young Turk movement, when the choice was between a democratic system with a slower pace of reform and an authoritarian one with more opportunities for radical measures, the second alternative won out, because for the Young Turks what counted in the end was the strengthening and survival of the state, democracy (or ‘constitutionalism’ or ‘national sovereignty’) being a means to that end, not an end in itself.

Like those of 1913–18, the Kemalist reforms aimed at secularizing and modernizing society. In September 1925 the religious shrines (türbe) and the dervish convents (tekke) were closed down and in November the fez, the red felt cap which had been the Ottoman gentleman’s traditional headgear since the days of Sultan Mahmut II, was prohibited and replaced by the western-style hat or cap. These measures met with stubborn resistance from the population. Tekkes and türbes played an important role in everyday Muslim life and the hat was considered a symbol of Christian Europe. The Independence Tribunals played their part in suppressing this resistance. Under the Law on the Maintenance of Order nearly 7500 people were arrested and 660 executed.

In the first half of 1926, the European calendar was adopted, as were the Swiss civil code and the penal code from Mussolini’s Italy. A number of laws restructuring the banking sector were passed and, except in the army, all courtesy titles (like Bey, Efendi or Paşa) were abolished.

Together with the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate and the proclamation of the republic, these measures form the first wave of the Kemalist reforms. It is clear that they constituted an extension of the Tanzimat and the Unionist reforms, which had secularized most of the legal and educational systems. With the relegation of the sultan-caliph to the role of ornament and the removal of the sâhibülislâm from the cabinet, the state itself had been secularized to a large extent. Islam had been the state religion of the empire, but so it was under the early republic.

The major new step of the Kemalists was the complete secularization of family law, something which, through the ‘abolition of religious marriages and polygamy touched the daily life of the population. They also went much further in the secularization of society (see below). That the sartorial aspects of the reforms (for example the ‘hat reform’) played such an important role (under the supporters of reform as well as under its enemies) fits into a tradition which went back to the new western-style uniforms, the fezzes and the stamboulines of Mahmut II’s servants. That this tradition lives on to the present day is shown by the recent debates about the wearing of scarves by female Muslim students.

Like the Unionist reformers before them, the Kemalists stopped short of unleashing a real socio-economic revolution or reform programme. There was no attempt to change the ownership relations in the country.

The day of reckoning: the İzmir conspiracy

The political opposition and its press had been silenced in 1925, but Mustafa Kemal was well aware of the capabilities of his opponents and of their expertise in underground organization (going back to the
days before the revolution of 1908), and he still felt insecure. As long as the former leaders of the CUP and the PRP were still around, with their prestige as heroes from the independence war intact, they could exploit the prevailing discontent arising from the continuing bad economic situation and the unpopularity of the reforms.

Mustafa Kemal spent May and June 1926 on an extended inspection tour of the south and the west of the country. When he was about to arrive in Izmir on 15 June (he was unexpectedly delayed), a plot to assassinate him was uncovered. The plotters were arrested and turned out to be a small band of professional gunmen, led by a former representative in the national assembly (and secretary of the Defence of Rights Group), Ziya Hurşit. The Ankara Independence Tribunal was sent to Izmir and immediately after its arrival on 18 June waves of arrests began.

Almost all the surviving prominent Unionists were arrested, as well as the former PRP members of the assembly, except for Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay) and Adnan (Adivar) who were abroad at the time. During the trial, which was held from 26 June to 12 July the arrested politicians were accused of having supported the assassination plot and of having planned a coup d'etat. Sixteen of the accused were condemned to death, in spite of the fact that most of them had not been proved to be involved. The military heroes associated with the PRP, Kâzım Karabekir, Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), Refet (Bele), and Cafer Tayyar (Eğilmez), were released under the pressure of public opinion and of signs of discontent from the army. It was clear, however, that their position in politics was irretrievably lost.

A second trial opened in Ankara in August against more than 50 important former Unionists. Even more than the first, this was a show trial, during which the policies of the CUP leaders when in power and their opposition to Mustafa Kemal were the real themes and the conspiracy of June 1926 was a side issue. Four of the accused were hanged, while a number of others received prison sentences. Hüseyin Rauf, who was officially regarded as the main culprit, was sentenced in absentia to ten years' imprisonment. Kara Kemal, who was regarded by the prosecution as the brains behind the actual assassination attempt, had been sentenced to death in absentia during the first part of the trial. When his hiding place in Istanbul was discovered, he shot himself.

End of an era: ‘The Speech’
The troubled post-war period was symbolically closed with Mustafa Kemal’s 36-hour speech before the congress of the Republican People’s Party from 15 to 20 October 1927. This is a remarkable and hugely influential text, which deserves consideration.

He presented it as a report on the history of the Turkish national movement from 1919 to 1927 and generally the historical character he claimed for his text has been accepted, although later generations in Turkey have debated whether it should be considered a historical source or a piece of historiography. The prestige of the author and the political climate of the period have seen to it that the text has become the basis for nearly all Turkish historiography on the period to the present day. It was translated into German, French and English in 1928–9 and has been deeply influential in foreign historiography as well.

In reality, the Nutuk (Speech), as it is simply known, is not a history of the period 1919–27, but ends with the emergence of the Progressive Republican Party in November 1924. Only 1.5 per cent of the text is concerned with later events. The reason is that the speech is not really a survey of modern Turkish history at all. It is a vindication of the purges of 1925–6 and criticism of the former leaders of the PRP is its main theme, just as criticism of the old CUP leaders had been the theme of Mustafa Kemal’s memoirs, published in March 1926. In his attempt to disgrace his former colleagues, he presents them throughout as doubters, incompetents and traitors, and depicts himself as the one who led the movement from the outset. It is significant that the speech begins with his arrival in Anatolia in May 1919, disregarding the earlier phase of the national resistance movement. In what is obviously a distortion of the historical truth, it presents the independence struggle not as one to preserve parts of the Ottoman Empire, but as a movement for the establishment of a new Turkish state.

The context in which the speech was given also served to distort the historical picture. The 1927 congress of the RPP called itself – and is generally described as – the ‘second congress of the RPP’ though in fact it was the first. The RPP called it the second because it retrospectively adopted the congress at Sivas in 1919 as its first, thus emphasizing the (false) identification of the RPP with the national liberation movement and monopolizing its heritage. While the period 1923–6 decisively influenced political life in Turkey in an authoritarian sense for the next 20 years, the congress of 1927 and Mustafa Kemal’s speech determined the historical vision of the genesis of the new Turkish state for generations.
11. The Kemalist One-Party State, 1925–45

The political system of Kemalist Turkey: party and state
From the promulgation of the Law on the Maintenance of Order in March 1925, Turkey's government was an authoritarian one-party regime, and, not to put too fine a point on it, a dictatorship. We have seen how the law and the tribunals established under it were used in 1925–6 to silence all opposition and how, in his great speech of 1927, Mustafa Kemal Pasha vindicated this repression. The Law on the Maintenance of Order remained in force until 1929, when the government felt secure enough to allow it to lapse. To all intents and purposes, the Republican People's Party had established a power monopoly, and at the party congress of 1931 the political system of Turkey was officially declared that of a one-party state.

Apart from an experiment with a "tame" opposition party in 1930, no legal opposition was active in Turkey until after the Second World War. Underground opposition was limited to an insignificant communist movement and more important actions of Kurdish nationalists. There were almost continuous small uprisings in the mountains of the south-east and one major insurrection in Dersim (Tunceli) in 1937–8. This was again suppressed with the utmost severity and again tens of thousands of Kurds were forcibly resettled in the west of the country. Small groups of emigres of different political colours (royalists, liberals, Islamists, socialists) continued to attack the regime in pamphlets and periodicals from places as far apart as Paris, Sofia, Damascus and Cairo, but none carried any real weight.

According to the 1924 constitution, all power resided in the Great National Assembly of Turkey, which was the only legitimate representative of the sovereign will of the nation. But one of the reactions of the RPP leadership to the emergence of opposition in 1924 had been to tighten party discipline to the extent that free discussion was only allowed in the (closed) meetings of the parliamentary party. After a decision on any topic had been reached in these meetings, delegates were bound by the majority decision and were required to vote for it in the assembly. This meant that even before March 1925, the assembly votes were a foregone conclusion. During the one-party era they became a mere formality. Discussion was restricted, even within the meetings of the parliamentary party which served as the forum where the cabinet announced and explained its decisions. Although the leeway of the faction varied according to the field of policy concerned (the economy being debated much more freely than foreign affairs, for instance, which were left almost completely to the cabinet), the function of its meetings was essentially to ratify and legitimize cabinet decisions.

While the RPP had a rank-and-file organization throughout the country, led by its secretary-general, it was dominated by the members of the national assembly, the cabinet, the prime minister (who was also executive chairman of the party) and the president (who doubled as party chairman). State and party were closely identified. One important result was that the party itself never developed an independent ideological or organizational 'personality' and became heavily bureaucratized. Attempts by the party's long-serving secretary-general, Recep (Peker), to make the party more independent and to develop an independent 'Kemalist' ideology failed when, at the 1936 congress, the congruency between the state apparatus and the party organization was declared official policy by İsmet (Inönü). This meant that, to take just one example, the governor of a province would automatically be the head of the RPP branch in his province.

Four-yearly parliamentary elections were held throughout the one-party period, but they served only a ceremonial function. The slates of candidates for parliamentary seats were drawn up by the chairman of the party, the executive chairman and the secretary-general and then ratified by the party congress and there was no way in which citizens, even if they were active party members, could stand for parliament on their own initiative.

Tutelary democracy: the Free Republican Party
The monolithic political system established after 1925 left very little room for the ventilation of competing ideas within the leadership,
and none at all for the expression of social discontent from without. At the same time, the authoritarian behaviour of the RPP and of its regional and local representatives, the attendant favouritism and corruption, the lack of civil liberties, and also the reform policies of the government, created widespread resentment. By the end of the 1920s this was compounded by the world economic crisis, which hit Turkey very hard, as it did other agricultural producers. The RPP had no real means of managing this discontent (other than suppressing its expression) since its authoritarian structure left it without the means of communication with the mass of the population. The crisis in the country was not reflected in more lively debates in the assembly at all.

In 1930, Mustafa Kemal, who was aware of the existence of discontent (though probably not of its scale) through reports and through his frequent inspection tours in the country, decided to allow and even encourage the founding of a loyal opposition party, with the twin aims of channelling the social discontent and of shaking up the lethargic RPP. He may also have wanted to put pressure on Ismet who, after five years in power, had gradually built up his own power base and was no longer only the president’s puppet.

Mustafa Kemal approached his old friend Fethi (Okyar) with an offer to found a new party. Fethi had recently returned from a tour of duty as ambassador in Paris (where he had been sent after his defeat as prime minister in March 1925) and had submitted a highly critical report on the state of the country and Ismet’s policies to the president. The two men discussed the proposal for a few days. Fethi asked for guarantees that the government would allow his party to function and that Mustafa Kemal himself would remain impartial. For his part, Mustafa Kemal demanded that the new party remain faithful to the ideals of republicanism and secularism. When they agreed, Fethi proceeded to found the Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Free Republican Party). Mustafa Kemal ordered a number of his closest collaborators, among them his oldest friend Nuri (Conker), to join the new party. To prove his good faith, he also announced that his own sister, Makhule, had joined it.

In the end, only 15 representatives joined the FRP but they were all eminent members of the Kemalist establishment. The party produced an 11-point manifesto, which echoed that of the Progressive Republican Party of 1924 in that it advocated a liberal economic policy and encouragement of foreign investment, as well as freedom of speech and direct elections (Turkey still had a system of two-tier elections).

The new party was greeted with widespread enthusiasm. Its branch offices were literally inundated with applications for membership. When Fethi visited İzmir early in September, he was met by huge and ecstatic crowds. There were skirmishes with the police, and when the police fired into the crowd a number of people were wounded and a boy killed. This was a turning point in the party’s short history. The FRP leaders were alarmed and demanded that Mustafa Kemal should state openly that he was and would remain at the head of the party, which he did on 10 September.

In October 1930, local elections were held and the FRP managed to win in 30 of the 512 councils. Even though this was only a small minority of the seats, the governing party was surprised and alarmed. Then, in an assembly debate directly after the elections, Fethi accused the governing party of large-scale irregularities and electoral fraud. This in turn led to fierce attacks on the FRP, in which it and its leader were accused of high treason. Mustafa Kemal now told Fethi privately that he could no longer remain impartial in this atmosphere. Unwilling to conduct political opposition against the president himself, Fethi felt he had no choice but to close down the FRP on 16 November 1930. For the rest of his life he remained bitter about what he felt to be Mustafa Kemal’s desertion at this juncture.

The RPP’s totalitarian tendencies
The extent of resentment and opposition to the RPP regime which the Free Party episode had brought to light were a sobering experience for Mustafa Kemal and his followers, who thereafter tightened their hold on the country by bringing under their direct control all the country’s cultural and intellectual life, suppressing those independent social and cultural organizations that had survived from the CUP era. There were no more experiments with opposition parties (indeed, as we have seen, Turkey was officially declared a one-party state), although Mustafa Kemal tried to combat the lethargy of the assembly by having a number of seats (30 in the 1931 elections, 16 in 1935) reserved for independents. In the prevailing climate, however, this was not very effective: in 1931 not even 30 people could be found who were willing to stand as independents.

First and foremost among the social and cultural institutions to be suppressed was the Türk Ocakları (Turkish Hearths). It had
been reactivated under the leadership of the minister of education, Hamdullah Suphi (Taoğlu) and tried to spread nationalist, positivist and secularist ideas in the country through lectures, courses and exhibitions. When it was closed down in 1931, it had over 30,000 members and 267 branches. In 1932 it was replaced by the so-called Halk Evleri (People's Homes) in towns and by Halk Odaları (People's Rooms) in large villages; they served essentially the same function but were tightly controlled by the provincial branches of the party. By the end of the Second World War there were nearly 500 of these People's Homes in all parts of the country.

Another organization to be closed down was the Türk Kadınlar Birliği (Turkish Women's Union), which had been founded in 1924 by women who had been active in the national resistance movement. At an extraordinary congress in May 1935 it decided to disband at the request of the RPP leadership, officially because its aims (equal rights for Turkish women) had been achieved with the granting of the vote to Turkey's women. The 'Turkish Freemasons' lodges, whose members had often been prominent in the Young Turk movement from the beginning of the century, were closed down in the same year.

All newspapers and periodicals leaning towards the liberal or socialist opposition had been closed down in 1925. From then on only government-controlled newspapers appeared, with the one exception of Yarım (Tomorrow), published in 1929–30 by Arif (Oruç), a left-wing journalist and – significantly – an old friend of Mustafa Kemal and Fethi. Yarım had been allowed to attack İsmet's economic policies (and as such it was a kind of forerunner of the FRP), but it was closed down in 1931 after the adoption of a new press law which gave the government powers to close down any paper which published anything contradicting the 'general policies of the country'.

Finally, in 1933, the old Darülfunun ('House of Sciences', the university) in Istanbul was given a new charter and reconstituted as the University of Istanbul. In the process two-thirds of its teaching staff, over 100 people, lost their tenure and only the most dependable followers of the Kemalist line were kept on. It was the first of many purges the Turkish universities were to experience in the following 50 years.

Both the press and the educational institutions were mobilized to spread the Kemalist message. The stifling political and intellectual climate that resulted has often been overlooked in traditional historiography and needs to be given due attention. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that the Kemalist leadership did inspire a great many people – mostly writers, teachers, doctors and other professionals, and students – with its vision of a modern, secular, independent Turkey. These people, who saw themselves as an elite, with a mission to guide their ignorant compatriots, often worked very hard and with great personal sacrifice for their ideals. This 'noble obligation' attitude of the Kemalist élite is something which tends to be overlooked by modern revisionist writers of the right and the left.

The Kemalist message
The set of ideas or ideals which together formed Kemalism (Kemalism) or Atatürkçülük (Ataturkism) as it came to be called in the 1930s, evolved gradually. It never became a coherent, all-embracing ideology, but can best be described as a set of attitudes and opinions, which were never defined in any detail. As we have seen, Recep Peker's attempts to do so failed. As a result, Kemalism remained a flexible concept and people with widely differing world views have been able to call themselves Kemalist. The basic principles of Kemalism were laid down in the party programme of 1931. They were: republicanism; secularism; nationalism; populism; statism; and revolutionism.

Secularism and nationalism had of course been among the distinctive characteristics of Young Turk ideology at least since 1913. During the 1930s both were carried to extremes, secularism being interpreted not only as a separation of state and religion, but as the removal of religion from public life and the establishment of complete state control over remaining religious institutions. An extreme form of nationalism, with the attendant creation of historical myths, was used as the prime instrument in the building of a new national identity, and as such was intended to take the place of religion in many respects.

Republicanism had been a basic principle since 1923 (when, it will be remembered, political activity in favour of a return of the monarchy had been outlawed). 'Populism' meant the notion, first emphasized during the First World War, of national solidarity and putting the interests of the whole nation before those of any group or class. In a negative sense it entailed a denial of class interests (according to Kemalism, Turkey did not have classes in the European sense) and a prohibition of political activity based on class (and thus of all socialist or communist activity). Revolutionism – or reformism, as
more conservative followers of Atatürk have preferred to interpret the Turkish term İnşaatçılık — meant a commitment to ongoing change and support for the Kemalist reform programme. Statism was a new concept, a recognition of the pre-eminence of the state in the economic field, and was probably the most widely discussed issue in Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s. It is treated in more detail below.

These six principles, symbolized in the party emblem as six arrows (the Altı Ok), were incorporated into the Turkish constitution in 1937. Together they formed the state ideology of Kemalism and the basis for indoctrination in schools, the media and the army. Sometimes Kemalism was even described as the ‘Turkish religion’. Nevertheless, as an ideology it lacked coherence and, perhaps even more importantly, emotional appeal. This ideological void was filled to some extent by the personality cult which grew up around Mustafa Kemal during and even more after his lifetime. He was presented as the father of the nation, its saviour, its teacher. Indoctrination in schools and universities (where ‘History of the Turkish Revolution’ became a compulsory subject in 1934) focused on him to an extraordinary degree. The fact that he was not associated with a very definite ideology which could be discredited, as Fascism, National Socialism and Marxism–Leninism have been, has meant that his personality cult could survive changes in the political climate. At the time of writing it is still very much part of the official culture of Turkey.

Friction within the leadership

While the political leadership was in complete control over both party and parliament, tensions gradually built up within the leadership, notably between İsmet, who served as prime minister for 12 consecutive years from 1925 to 1937, and the president, Mustafa Kemal. In his later years the president largely withdrew from politics and left the day-to-day running of the country in İsmet’s hands, while he interested himself in specific reform projects such as that of the script and the language. He surrounded himself with a small group of supporters and friends with whom he spent most nights eating, drinking and discussing the problems and the future of the country. Experts from different walks of life were often invited to these sessions in the presidential villa in Çanakkale, which as a rule lasted from late in the evening until the break of day. Suggestions were made, criticisms voiced, plans drawn up and decisions taken.

What made the situation potentially dangerous was Mustafa Kemal’s relative isolation from the daily affairs of the government. His plans and decisions therefore tended to become increasingly ill-coordinated with those of the prime minister, İsmet. The fact that, even in semi-retirement, Mustafa Kemal remained the undisputed master of the country meant that he could overrule the prime minister and his cabinet if he chose to do so under the influence of his circle of friends and advisers. Over the years there were several instances of this happening, in internal, economic and foreign affairs. Twice the president forced a cabinet minister to resign without consulting İsmet. His interference irritated İsmet, who became increasingly wary of what he saw as the president’s kitchen cabinet in Çanakkale.

Finally, in September 1937, there was an open row between the two men which led to Atatürk (as he had become in 1934 with the introduction of family names) demanding İsmet’s resignation. İnönü duly resigned, ostensibly for health reasons. He was replaced by Mahmut Celâl (Bayar), a former CUP secretary and Teşkilât-i Mahsusa chief in İzmir, first head of the Business Bank of Turkey (Türkiye İş Bankası), created in 1924, and minister of economic affairs since 1932.

Atatürk’s death and İsmet’s return to power

Some of Atatürk’s irritability and erratic behaviour during 1937–8 may have been due to his deteriorating health. Apart from two heart attacks, in 1923 and 1927, which seem to have left no permanent damage, he was generally healthy until early in 1937, when the symptoms of advanced cirrhosis of the liver, due to excessive consumption of alcohol over many years, began to make themselves felt. The illness was officially diagnosed only at the beginning of 1938 and from March onwards his condition started to deteriorate quickly. His illness was kept a secret from the public (even in October a newspaper which mentioned it was immediately closed for three months), but leading political circles were well aware of the impending end and a struggle for power began.

In spite of the events of the last year, İsmet İnönü was clearly the leading candidate for the succession, but he had made many enemies during his years in office, the most determined enemies being the members of Atatürk’s ‘kitchen cabinet’. They attempted to remove him (by having him appointed ambassador to Washington) and to engineer new elections for the assembly, which would have to elect Atatürk’s successor and which was still packed with İsmet’s
supporters. There was even talk of a verbal ‘political testament’ of the president, in which he pronounced himself against İsmet’s succession.

All these attempts proved fruitless, however. Mustafa Kemal Pasha Atatürk died on 10 November 1938 in the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, where he had been lying ill for the last few months. On 11 November the national assembly elected İsmet İnönü the second president of the republic. His succession was due to four factors: the refusal of the prime minister, Bayar, to cooperate with his adversaries (Bayar had kept in touch with İnönü throughout this period); his adversaries’ inability to come up with a credible candidate; the fact that the parliamentary deputies, as well as the party bureaucrats, were people who had been picked by İnönü himself years before; and the decision of the military leaders to support İnönü and of the chief of the general staff, Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, not to stand as a candidate, even though it was made clear to him that his candidacy would have considerable support in the assembly.

Atatürk’s body was brought to Ankara amid widespread demonstrations of grief and mourning and laid to rest temporarily in the Ethnographic Museum. In 1953 it was finally interred in an imposing purpose-built mausoleum on what was then a hill on the outskirts of the capital but is now right in its centre.

An obituary

Under the influence of the official historiography of the Turkish Republic (and ultimately of Atatürk himself in his great speech), historians have depicted the emergence of modern Turkey as the single-handed achievement of one man. The reader will have noticed that in this book an attempt has been made to paint a different picture. Nevertheless, it remains true that it is very doubtful whether Turkey would have survived as an independent state without his unique combination of tactical mastery, ruthlessness, realism and sense of purpose. Up to 1919 he had been a member of the military inner circle of the CUP with a reputation as both a brilliant staff officer and a quarrelsome and overambitious personality. His rule after 1925 may be regarded both as a daring attempt at achieving a modernization leap for Turkish society and as a regressive phase in the development of mature and democratic political institutions in Turkey, but there can be hardly any doubt that he was absolutely the right man on the right spot during the greatest crisis in the history of his country and contributed more than anyone else to its survival.

İsmet İnönü as ‘National Leader’
Around the time of Atatürk’s death there had been widespread speculation about whether there would be a change in policy and even about whether the republic would endure. It was soon clear, however, that İsmet İnönü meant to continue the basic policies of his predecessor. His position as leader was formalized at an extraordinary party congress in December 1938, at which the party statutes were changed to make Atatürk the ‘eternal party chairman’, while İnönü was made ‘permanent party chairman’. The term Millî Şef (National Leader), which from time to time had been used for Atatürk in the 1930s, now became İnönü’s official title.

For a few months İnönü kept Bayar as prime minister, but on 25 January 1939, the latter handed in his resignation. The main reason was the basic difference of opinion between the president and the prime minister over economic policies, but İnönü had also made life difficult for the cabinet by inspiring a number of press campaigns, inquiries and lawsuits aimed at the administration which had been in power in 1937–8. At the same time İnönü tried to broaden his political base by a policy of reconciliation with the old leaders of the independence movement who had been purged in 1926. Two of these, Ali Fuat Cebesoy and Refet Bete had made their peace with Atatürk during his last years, but the rest had remained in limbo. A number of them had lived abroad since 1926. They now returned to the country and were given parliamentary seats.

Celâl Bayar was succeeded by Dr Refik Saydam, who served as prime minister until his death in July 1942. He in turn was succeeded by the foreign minister, Şükrü Saracoğlu, who remained in power until 1945, but during these years, which were of course entirely dominated by the Second World War, İsmet İnönü was in complete control and his prime ministers (who were always at the same time vice-chairmen of the party) executed the policies determined by the president.

The Turkish regime of the 1930s and 1940s, of which the main characteristics have been outlined above, thus in many ways resembled the other authoritarian regimes which sprang up all over southern Europe in this era (such as the regimes of Salazar in Portugal, Franco in Spain and Metaxas in Greece). It differed from them, however, in that it was not culturally and religiously conservative, but on the contrary attempted a far-reaching cultural revolution in a conservatively religious society. The example of the most important