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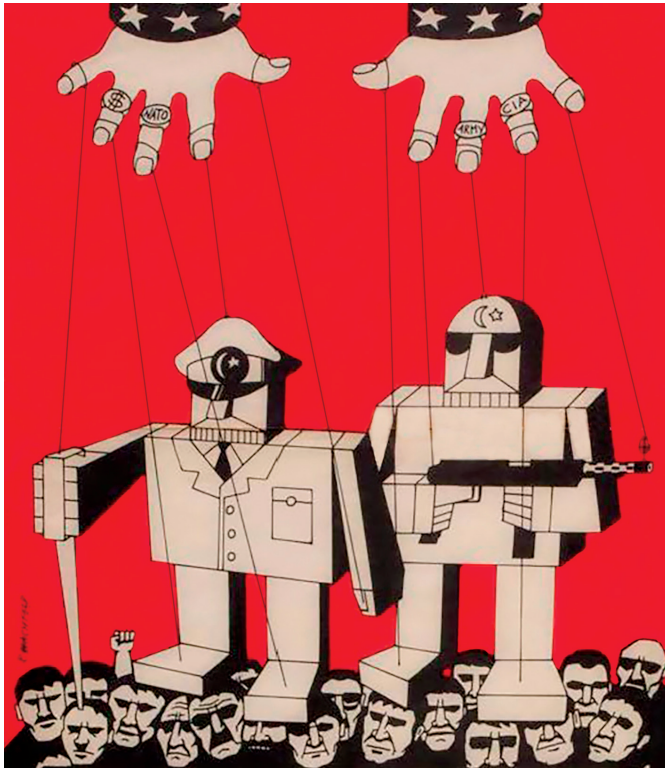
*Historica*



# Toward a Cultural History of the Cold War in Turkey

*Ideological dynamics,  
cultural production, media*

Edited by Fulvio Bertucelli



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Collana Studi e Ricerche 155

Historica

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## 2. Between the two poles: the anti-communist centre-left discourse in the Republican People's Party in the Cold War period (1950s-1970s)

*Ali Açıkgöz, Carlo Sanna*

### 2. 1. Introduction: the Cold War environment in Turkey

The Cold War period and its study are a matter of methodological challenge and conflicting views, significantly since the fall of the USSR in the early 1990s, and at least several strains of interpretation regarding the conflict between the communist "East" and the capitalist "West" appeared in the literature. Thus, calls were made to expand the ways of looking at the foreign policy angle and expanding the field to include inquiries regarding "gender, race and social history"<sup>1</sup>. The key development to overcome traditional "bipolarity" in new topical and methodological pursuits was the immense influx of the archival material. Over the last two decades the research has expanded to include geographies such as Europe<sup>2</sup> and Latin America<sup>3</sup>.

In terms of study of the Cold War in Turkey, albeit the emphasis on the international affairs persists, scholarly efforts have also expanded to the cultural and ideological angles<sup>4</sup>. Recent calls were also made to place special emphasis on the ideology and activities of the (both Islamist and nationalist) far-right<sup>5</sup>. However, most of the existing literature dealing with the left in Turkish political history and party politics during the Cold War period focused mainly on the cultural and political

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<sup>1</sup> Westad 2000; Pineo 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Autio Sarasmo 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Örnek, Üngör 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Aytürk 2015.

movements located at the far or extreme ends of the spectrum<sup>6</sup>. Even when dealing with the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), which after the turn to multi-party politics embarked in a slow but steady path towards the "left of centre" and social democracy, important research has been carried on about its relations with the movements of the far left<sup>7</sup>. Particular attention has been dedicated to the cultural and political relevance of intellectual circles such as those around "Yön" (Direction), "Ant" (Oath), "Türk Solu" (Turkish Left) and "Devrim" (Revolution) journals or parties such as the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP) and movements such as the National Democratic Revolution (*Milli Demokratik Devrim*, MDD), and the Revolutionary Youth Federation (Devrimci Gençlik Federasyonu, *Dev-Genç*). Moreover, focus has been placed on their role in shaping the discourse of the (far) left in Turkey and in reflecting the topics that characterized the international debate of the bi-polar environment. In that light, a discussion on the developments in the centre-left during the 1960s and 1970s is needed to further place the left in Turkey in a global context, refraining from falling to a trap of essentialism regarding bipolarity of the Cold War ideological situation<sup>8</sup> or the trap of essentialism with regards to the left<sup>9</sup> as it connotes a larger family of different radical, moderate and doctrinal movements, groups and parties, not just Kremlin, Beijing or their satellites<sup>10</sup>.

The centre-left in Turkey organized out of a synthesis of early-republican kemalist and European democratic socialist traditions. Above all, anti-imperialism (oftentimes meant as anti-Americanism, with the US perceived as supporters of the far-right in Turkey), refusal of the extra-parliamentarian means of achieving power, and anti-communism (meaning a refusal of complete state ownership in economy apart from certain strategic sectors such as oil industry, and an embrace of small propriety and market competition) appear to be intellectual inclinations that reflect aspects of such a change for the CHP. Far less attention has been dedicated to the development, within the CHP, of a debate around these topics in the light of its rising internal

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<sup>6</sup> Landau 1974; Aydınoglu 2007, Ulus 2011; Bertuccelli 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Erdoğan 1998; Emre 2014a; Yaşlı 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ugur Cinar, Acikgoz 2023; Manwaring, Kennedy 2017; Sandbrook et al. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Gencoglu Onbasi 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Eley 2002.

movement of the “left of centre”. This chapter aims to explore the evolution of the discourse within the CHP during the Cold War, answering the questions: What are the main ideological demarcation lines of the CHP’s left of centre from other political movements on the Turkish political spectrum at that time? How were these discussions reflected in the overall political strategy of the CHP in the 1960s and 1970s? Who were the intra- and extra-party allies and opponents for the centre-left movement in this era? In this article we provide a revisionist descriptive account of major ideological, and cadre shifts in the CHP as a political party. The aim is to capture the effects of the Cold War ideological clashes over the centre-left politics while trying to get away from the bipolar approaches in the literature. The main sources are memoirs and public writings of relevant political actors of the CHP, journals/newspapers close to the CHP such as “Ulus” (Nation), “Akis” (Echo), and “Kim” (Who).

## **2.2. The CHP in the opening of the Cold War (1945-1960)**

### **2.2.1. CHP and post-WWII reconstruction: Marshall Fund and NATO**

The years that followed the end of the Second World War were years of profound change in Turkey, which laid the foundations of its future positioning in the Cold War. In this period, Turkey engaged in a process of internal institutional and economic reform, and in a foreign policy approach that oriented its first decisive steps in the direction of the Western system of alliances and organizations. As US-Soviet relations progressively deteriorated after the end of WWII, a “special role” started to be envisioned for Turkey and Greece by US State Department officials to improve both the military capabilities of the two countries to contrast the Soviet Union and to enhance the strategic interests of the US in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean regions<sup>11</sup>. This interest most notably evolved into framing Turkey as one pillar of the Truman Doctrine since 1947, and having it included in the Marshall Aid plan, which further promoted the mechanization of agriculture and industrialization started in the 1930s, and the first economic boom of the early 1950s that significantly contributed to the electoral for-

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<sup>11</sup> Leffler 1985, pp. 810-814.

tunes of the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) in that period<sup>12</sup>. The strategic integration of Turkey in the nascent Western system of alliances, of which its active participation in the Korean War (1950-1953) is a notable example, led it to be included since the earliest phases in the formation of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in 1948, to the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1949, to the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952. The first measures of liberalization in the political and economic fields went together with – and were made necessary by – these developments, leading to the creation of some space of private economic enterprise in a system overall still characterized by statism, and especially to the transformation of Turkey into a multi-party system between 1946 and 1950. While the 1950s were entirely characterized by the DP's uninterrupted rule, these changes had been initiated and promoted between the terminal phase of the CHP single-party rule and the early multi-party phase under the leadership of İsmet İnönü.

Many of these developments were a result of the internal dynamics within the CHP itself: until the end of the 1940s, the debates in the (single) party administrative bodies' meetings and conventions directly influenced the policies output. In this sense, the formation of other opposition parties can be read as the outcome not only of the pressures of a faction pushing for political and economic liberalization – as shown with the “*Dörtlülük Takrir*” (Declaration of the Four)<sup>13</sup> but also the liberal and pro-democratic concessions promoted by İnönü's leadership itself and formalized in the CHP's 2<sup>nd</sup> Extraordinary Congress (*Olağanüstü Kurultay*) that opened the way for multi-party politics and for a less restricted debate to happen in the public sphere. In this period, neither the conflict between the CHP and this newly born DP opposition, nor that between the CHP ruling élite and its intra-party opposition were fought along the classical left-right spectrum. First, because as Karpat argues, “on the question of leftism both the opposition and the government parties were in agreement”<sup>14</sup> to the point that, for example, despite the harsh criticism of the DP towards the illiberal measures of

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<sup>12</sup> Çarkoğlu 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Presented on 7 June 1945, to the parliament by Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes, Fuad Köprülü, and Refik Koraltan who soon left the CHP or expelled and established the DP.

<sup>14</sup> Karpat 1959, p. 179.

Recep Peker's government, there were no reactions against the government's December 1946 decision to close various trade unions, political parties, and newspapers on charge of promotion of class struggle. Second, a slightly structured internal opposition was emerging inside the CHP. The most relevant intra-party debates revolved around the issue of the rapidity and extent of the democratic transition, and the space and freedoms to accord to the opposition: while the group led by Peker consisting of mainly veteran party members advocated for a stricter control and for the procrastination of the transition to a multi-party system, a second group of younger and more liberal Republicans, was in favour of the democratic transition. The above described international environment of the early Cold War was certainly influential in making this second group's (and İnönü's) pro-democracy line pass, as İnönü's stated commitment and efforts towards a multi-party and more democratic system (of which the 12 July Declaration [*12 Temmuz Beyannamesi*] is the biggest example) were instrumental in convincing an otherwise skeptical US Congress in turning a blind-eye on the actual democratic credentials of Turkey and include it in the program of US-funded aids for the sake of anti-Soviet strategic goals<sup>15</sup>.

In the political arena, both WW2 and the post-war transition to multi-party politics presented an opportunity for both what has been deemed as the "extreme" left and right. On the right, as the Nazi war machine started to lose ground in the war zones of Europe, the ring-leaders of the urban ultra-nationalist movement were tried in what was called the "Trial of Racism-Turanism" affair. On the left, the suppression was much more serious. The murder of the famous leftist author and poet Sabahattin Ali, the self-exile of poet Nazım Hikmet and the closure of "Tan" (Dawn) newspaper, as well as obstruction of the dissemination of "Görüşler" (Views) which was supposed to bring together the authors of the "*Dörtlülük Takrir*" and prominent leftist thinkers of the day, and finally the raid of "Tan"'s publishing house in early December 1945 aimed to curb any connections between the newly rising democratic opposition and the left-wing intelligentsia of the day<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Karpat 1959, pp.188-193; Leffler 1985.

<sup>16</sup> See Çelik 2021, 343-371.

### 2.2.2. The CHP's change for survival

The electoral defeat against the DP, in 1950, served as a crucial turning point for CHP. During the 1950s the party had to choose to either fall into obscurity or re-adapt itself to the new political context and to its new role as an opposition party. One of its first decisions was to detach itself from the policies of the state for the first time since the founding of the Republic. The debates in the CHP over ideology started to take place very slowly in this decade. Also, in response to the need of taking a position against the DP government, the CHP leader İnönü engaged in alliance building and organizational expansion towards other parties, which paved the way for new ideas and actors to join the CHP<sup>17</sup>. During the 1950s, there were few experienced politicians associating themselves with the left<sup>18</sup>. Apart from older members, a younger generation of politicians such as Bülent Ecevit and Altan Öymen, who started their cursus in the party from within the ranks of the CHP Youth Branch<sup>19</sup> and others from professional backgrounds such as Kamil Kırıkoğlu, Ferda Güley, and Murat Öner, joined the CHP. Another significant external input in new personnel came from the breakaway group of the Freedom Party (*Hürriyet Partisi*, HP)<sup>20</sup>: the newcomers were mostly young, technocratic-minded, and well-educated politicians<sup>21</sup> such as Coşkun Kırca and Turan Güneş. Some of those young guard soon gave a significant contribution to the intellectual works of the nascent Bureau of Research and Documentation (*CHP Araştırma ve Dokümantasyon Merkezi*, established by Turhan Feyzioğlu, Doğan Avcıoğlu, Bülent Ecevit, and Osman Okyar in 1958) and entered the governing bodies of the CHP in its 1959 Congress<sup>22</sup>. This body and the group of newcomers were significant not only for their policy prescriptions, but also for the setting up of a control over the correspondence between the CHP and the foreign ministries. Emre<sup>23</sup> reported that this Bureau also worked as a shadow foreign affairs department, having direct lines of communication with the U.S. Embassy in Ankara.

<sup>17</sup> Kili 1976.

<sup>18</sup> As, for example, Cemil Sait Barlas.

<sup>19</sup> Kaya 2021, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Karaömerlioğlu, Kirişçioğlu 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Keyder 1987, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> Emre 2013, pp. 85-86.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

The main drive for the change had been two-fold. First was the internal opposition to the chairperson İnönü, by some of the provincial party elites and their representative Kasım Gülek. However, Gülek's effort for taking the control of the party was short-lived. He failed to bring in any ideational or institutional change<sup>24</sup>, rather relying on instrumentalizing the demands of the local branches towards the party centrum. A reform commission work after the 1954 electoral defeat was brushed aside not only by İnönü but also by Gülek himself<sup>25</sup>. Instead, the CHP programme adopted an *étatist*, pro-labour attitude for the 1957 elections with the push from the newer generation of policy entrepreneurs joining the CHP<sup>26</sup>. Gülek was finally removed from his office in 1959.

Overall, the party change in the CHP was shaped first by its need to stay relevant in the new multi-party environment. The CHP's voter base stayed mainly around central and eastern Anatolian cities with traditional elite connections: only in 1957 elections this trend started to reverse in major urban areas<sup>27</sup>. Secondly, the rising authoritarianism of the DP and the worsening economy allowed for the CHP to be a harbour for opposition<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, it opened to newcomers, who started to rebrand its party identity, ideas, and policy preferences. In the 1950s, on one hand, the party establishment was able to fully designate the outlook of the party in terms of its ideas; on the other hand, the newer generation used internal competition to bring about new ideas on redistribution, state involvement in economy, social and democratic institutions, and of course the left.

### 2.2.3. A left-leaning anticommunism

In the 1950s, the CHP élites were forced by the political circumstances to accept that the electoral defeats were due to the party's deficiencies on the supply side. Simultaneously, the intra-party competition between the ruling coalition led by İnönü and supported by most of the above-mentioned young intellectuals and professionals, and the

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<sup>24</sup> Güneş Ayata 2010, p. 79

<sup>25</sup> Kılıç 2020, p. 1391.

<sup>26</sup> Kili 1976, pp. 129-130.

<sup>27</sup> Cinar, Ugur Cinar and Acikgoz 2022, p. 214.

<sup>28</sup> Kili 1976, p. 124.

faction grouped around Gülek (among them was Kırıkoğlu) sparked<sup>29</sup>. Despite this, the élites of the party remained cautious in reaffirming anti-communism. Already in this period some of the Six Arrows (especially “étatism” and “populism”) were revised, while some principles of labour rights, redistribution, freedom to unionize, and social state were introduced<sup>30</sup>. The “Declaration of Primary Aims” (*İlk Hedefler Beyannamesi*) was an emblematical product of both ideational change (as it included all these new principles), and of the contribution of the newly entered élites (as the Research Bureau team gave a great contribution in its preparation, and as it was presented to the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the party by Turan Güneş). This document and other policy prescriptions became a basis for the main ideas that were pushed in the constitution-writing and policy making efforts of the CHP in the 1960s.

The ideational discussion for the new-coming generation took place over the 1950s in the “Forum” magazine. Both the CHP youth and the ex-HP members were among the discussants. The main aim of the magazine was to bring about a discussion between the kemalist and liberal wings of the intelligentsia<sup>31</sup>. Its authors and editors were also positioning Turkey in the Western alliance against communism even though some writings defended that position in the name of the left<sup>32</sup>. In an article, Bülent Ecevit – at that time a simple CHP member and journalist – wrote about many communist members of the intelligentsia switching to a more democratic alternative in their leftist positions after WWII. He claimed that the policing environment created by the state in Turkey made such an anti-Soviet turn in the Turkish intelligentsia harder<sup>33</sup>. Ecevit had in fact been selected by US institutions twice to visit the USA, first as part of journalism internship in 1954, and then in 1957 as a holder of the Rockefeller scholarship which landed him in the classroom of Henry Kissinger in Harvard<sup>34</sup>. However, an exhaustive reading of Ecevit’s works during the 1950s showed that his anti-communism was mostly based in human rights concerns. He blamed the DP for having created a communist threat

<sup>29</sup> Emre 2013, p. 85; Kili 1976; Güneş Ayata 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Emre 2014b; Kili 1976.

<sup>31</sup> Örnek 2015, pp. 278, 283; Çakmak 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Örnek 2015, pp. 282, 296.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 286-287.

<sup>34</sup> Akar and Dündar 2006, pp. 51-52, 55-56.

in Turkey, curbing social justice, freedom to unionize, and right to strike<sup>35</sup>. He also favoured a left-wing solution against the spread of communism, bringing in the non-doctrinal stance of the Labour Party in Britain, and Israel, or the Swedish Socialist Party. Ecevit's position and insistence on defending labour demarcated him from the Turkish right of the next decade. Whereas the right saw modernization and the shift towards the western world as the source of communism, Ecevit embraced western democracy as the solution. The future demarcation lines of the CHP from the rest of the party system in the 1960's was being put in place<sup>36</sup>.

A much less nuanced but still meaningful ideological development was taking place in the higher echelons of the CHP. İnönü started to argue after the 1954 elections that the liberal market paradigm had been rendered outmoded and the world started to move towards socialist economies. According to İnönü the CHP's own tradition of national developmentalism (namely etatism) prevented the CHP from using the term. A planned and interventionist economy was the innovative pillar of the new etatism<sup>37</sup>. There were two possible motivations for this shift of İnönü: First, was the tradition of pragmatic economic policies of the CHP, culminated in its etatism. Second, a response to the opponents' (especially the DP) instrumental use of anti-communism, to distance CHP from communism. Still, the CHP remained the main target of the DP's anti-communism, perhaps in a similar – but starker – way than what CHP had instigated in the second half of the 1940s against the newly forming political opposition. In the last days of its government, the DP created a parliamentary "Commission for Investigation" (*Tahkikat Komisyonu*) that claimed the CHP was directly in connection with the radio operations of the Communist Party of Turkey operating from Moscow<sup>38</sup>. The CHP's defence against the DP's authoritarian pressures was to organize among the university professors and students. On the eve of the investigation, these allies numbered to 25,000 people<sup>39</sup>, managing to arrange large protests against the DP government in Ankara

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<sup>35</sup> Sanlı 2021, p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> bilâ 2008, p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> Kirişcioğlu 1973, p. 202.

<sup>39</sup> Karpaz 1966, p. 180.

and Istanbul. The CHP's efforts to organize among the university circles was known and closely watched by the CIA<sup>40</sup>.

### 2.3. CHP and the "left of centre" (1960-1974)

#### 2.3.1. The context after 1960 *coup d'etat*

Opened with the coup of May 27, 1960, the decade of the Sixties is topical for the dynamics hereby analysed. The international system was becoming more and more polarized as the Cold War entered one of its most heated phases before the *détente*: from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the war in Vietnam, to the announcement of the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" by Leonid Brezhnev. Turkey was the protagonist of one of the biggest episodes of tension within NATO, with the Cyprus issue escalating in inter-communal violence in 1963-1964, resulting in the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force and the political pressure of US President Lyndon Johnson.

Most importantly, the polarisation of the Cold War and intra-alliance disputes were directly reflected in Turkey's internal dynamics, also within the CHP. On the one hand, the new 1961 Constitution which greatly expanded civil liberties and granted extensive social rights<sup>41</sup> created new spaces for political expression for the political left. Labour organizations and trade unions proliferated because of this and of the 1963 Labour Law pushed by Ecevit as the Minister of Labour of the three İnönü cabinets (1961-1965), that significantly expanded labour and union rights. Many other left-wing political subjects were established in this decade in Turkey<sup>42</sup> in the form of parties (e.g. the Workers' Party of Turkey, TİP, 1961-71), of student and youth movements (e.g. the Federation of Idea Clubs, *Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu*, 1965-69), and of left-wing intellectual circles. The rise of the left was met with a parallel surge in right-wing and anti-communist forces. Any reference to communism was prohibited by the 1965 Law on Political Parties<sup>43</sup>, and the association with communism and socialism

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<sup>40</sup> The CIA document regarding the student protests in Turkey of April 1960 was published by the Turkish historian and writer Tolga Gerger on his X/Twitter profile on 05/09/2023: <https://x.com/tolgagerger/status/1699102649587577289?s=20>.

<sup>41</sup> Özbudun 1997, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> Bertucelli 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Dodd 1969, p. 131.

was used as a political weapon by the right to discredit and threaten its adversaries. These stances found home in various political parties, especially in the Republican Peasants' Nation Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*, CKMP) since the former Colonel Alparslan Türkeş took over its control in 1965 and re-branded it as Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) in 1969. But parties were not the sole expression of the anti-communist sentiment: many organizations, intellectual circles, newspapers were established around it, as exemplified by the Association for the Fight of Communism in Turkey (*Türkiye Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği*, TKMD, established in 1963) that somehow institutionalized the fight against communism in Turkey<sup>44</sup> as even Turkish President Cemal Gürsel was its honorary chairman<sup>45</sup>, and the Idealist Hearths (*Ülkü Ocakları*) – better known as the Grey Wolves (*Bozkurtlar*) – who will play a pivotal role in the outburst of political violence of the 1970s.

It is in this growing anti-communist environment that the CHP, until 1965 committed to the governing experience, started to talk of itself as a party at the “left of centre” (*ortanın solu*). It did so initially as a discourse to position itself away from extreme poles on the political spectrum, aiming to shield against right-wing accusations of communism while embracing the new environment supportive of left-wing politics<sup>46</sup>, where the party had already made significant (albeit limited) openings. Examples of these openings are the liberal safeguards, democratic freedoms, and labour-friendly social and economic provisions that found place in the 1961 Constitution<sup>47</sup> wanted by the CHP members of the founding assembly, and which were largely drawn from the CHP's 1959 “Declaration of Primary Aims”<sup>48</sup>; or the Labour Law of 1963 as a success of the intra-CHP élite of the R&D Bureau<sup>49</sup>. However, fully embracing left-wing politics was hindered by the intense intra-party factionalism. The internal constraints regarded even the principles of the “Declaration”, which had been previously accepted by the right-wing of the CHP that now started to consider it too much leaning

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<sup>44</sup> Güldal 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmad, Ahmad 1976, p. 293.

<sup>46</sup> Akis 1960, p. 26; Emre 2014a, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> Isiksel 2013, p. 714

<sup>48</sup> Emre 2014a, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

on the left. For the rest of the 1960s the shift of the CHP towards the left of centre was at point a problematic and at best a conflictual one.

Significant internal and external developments in the first half of the 1960s should be mentioned as examples. The first was a failed alliance with the labour movement in 1961 by Ecevit. During the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CHP in August 1961, Ecevit proposed that a maximum of 15% labour representative quota should be put in effect in localities with significant labour population to enable them to raise their voice in the legislative bodies of Turkey<sup>50</sup>. Although the motion was accepted in the Congress its application was postponed due to intra-party right-wing opposition. This fed into TİP's rise, as a lack of effort of CHP pushed the main left-wing labour union of the day (*Türk-İş*) towards the former. This development exposed another fault-line at the intelligentsia. CHP's connection to the "Yön" movement, Muammer Aksoy, offered Ecevit to start a new party called "Labourers' Party" (*Çalışanlar Partisi*) after the breaking out of the unionists and the CHP. The "Yön" group's effort was aimed at stopping the rise of TİP. Ecevit refused and pursued his pro-labour policies in the CHP<sup>51</sup>. During his ministry, he focused on expanding social security to all workplaces and securing the right for workers to participate in workplace administration and profit sharing<sup>52</sup>. Ecevit rationalized his pro-labour attitudes as an effort to curb the radical left, but still faced hostility from the right-wing members of İnönü cabinets and the CHP party assembly<sup>53</sup>. A second internal push came when Ecevit, Güneş and İbrahim Öktem offered during a Party Assembly meeting to give the CHP a new way to stop losing the youth to TİP. Some members attacked the proposal as communist leaning, and it was brushed aside by the meeting chair and General Secretary İsmail Rüştü Aksal<sup>54</sup>. The resistance to left-wing ideas in the CHP was due to a general tendency of anti-communism fed by the presence of DP successors in the İnönü cabinets. During coalition governments the CHP lost connections and competitive advantages over the university youth and the left-wing intelligentsia. Another external development widened the cleavage between the latter

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<sup>50</sup> Bilâ 1987, pp. 257-278.

<sup>51</sup> Öner 1976, p. 48; Atılğan 2008, p. 266.

<sup>52</sup> Kili 1976, p. 190.

<sup>53</sup> Uyar 2017, p. 120.

<sup>54</sup> Güneş 2009, p. 67.

and the CHP: the disgruntlement in the army regarding the victory of the DP successors in the 1961 elections. Soon after the elections the military forced the CHP and the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP), to form the First İnönü coalition cabinet. The lack of commitment of the coalition to policy prescriptions such as the land reform bill, petroleum bill, and the role of foreign investment in economy, as stated in the CHP programme, created an outcry in the left-wing journals and among left-leaning youth branch members of the CHP, the most prominent being Kemal Anadol<sup>55</sup>.

The last İnönü government came to an end after the Cyprus crisis in 1964. The sentiment of the close circle around İnönü, as written by his son-in-law Metin Toker, was that there was American involvement in the collapse of the coalition<sup>56</sup>. The CHP went to the 1965 Elections in such a mood and the anti-American sentiment rose especially after the experience of the elections among the left-leaning members of the CHP such as Ecevit<sup>57</sup>. The sentiment was so strong that even after two years, Öner claimed that İnönü told during a Party Assembly meeting regarding NATO in 1967, "I work so much, yet the U.S. will not let me become prime minister"<sup>58</sup>.

It is widely accepted in the literature<sup>59</sup> that İnönü and the CHP declared their position on the "left of centre" during the 1965 elections campaign, as a direct effect of the energetic entrance of the TİP into the Turkish party system. According to this argument the CHP, as an anti-communist party, wanted to actively stop the TİP from gaining more ground, thus emulating its ideas and slogans<sup>60</sup>. This argument has some value as it is evident from previous discussion of the CHP elite around the meaning of the left presented above. Moreover, a close reading of party sources and memoirs of the CHP MPs and local cadres showed that the TİP had an allure over the voter base of the CHP<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Kili 1976, pp. 199-206; Bilâ 1987, pp. 274-275; Kaya 2021, pp. 38-40.

<sup>56</sup> Kili 1976, pp. 207-208.

<sup>57</sup> Uyar 2017, p. 209; Öner 1976, pp. 135-137.

<sup>58</sup> Öner 1976, pp. 279-281.

<sup>59</sup> Kili 1976; Yaşlı 2020; Emre 2014a; Uyar 2017.

<sup>60</sup> CHP acquired some of its slogans from the cultural left of the day. However, programmatic tendencies and policy prescriptions of the CHP and the TİP had significant differences. See: Erdem 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Neftçi 1997, pp. 70-1; Bakşık 2009, p. 225. Also see: Emre 2014a, p. 90.

The AP started the 1965 campaign with an all-out offensive accusing both the CHP and TİP of being communist, using the TKMD, and brought such accusations to the core of its electoral campaign. According to Kili, the third İnönü coalition moving away from a pro-US foreign affairs focus and a cultural ties agreement with the USSR during its last days were the grounds of the AP's offensive<sup>62</sup>. The CHP's response was to first counter the accusations. From June to July 1965 CHP's newspaper "Ulus" carried the issue to headlines via messages of Kemal Satır, Turan Feyzioğlu and İnönü, and defended the party<sup>63</sup>. On 15 July, İnönü visited prime minister Suat Hayri Ürgüplü, delivered his concerns for electoral security, declared the TKMD akin to Nazi SS, and demanded Gürsel's resignation from the honorary membership<sup>64</sup>. CHP's defence continued until 25 July when İnönü made his famous statement that CHP was a party on the "left of centre" and reiterated it over several other interviews<sup>65</sup>. This defence however was not effective as little ideological discussion took place for in the public and the CHP members were unable to make convincing arguments regarding this sudden turn to centre-left politics. The AP pushed forward with its new slogan "*Ortanın solu, Moskova yolu*" (Left of centre, way to Moscow). The TİP kept a watchful eye and lowered the tone of its general critiques of the CHP for the election period<sup>66</sup>. The data suggest that the reason for CHP's turn to left was not due to competition from the TİP. No open references or polemics could be seen regarding TİP's "non-capitalist path to development" in CHP sources. Rather it was anti-communist right-wing activism which pushed the CHP to rearticulate its identity. Narrative evidence supported this point as Nihat Erim wrote in his diary "İnönü had told it in June against the propaganda that RPP was taking it to communism"<sup>67</sup>.

The open turn to the left for the CHP was a problematic one both in terms of its electoral chances and internal cohesion. Soon after the elections internal discussions started and quickly got heated, as those who supported the "left of centre" stance and those opposing formed

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<sup>62</sup> Kili 1976, p. 208; Emre 2014a, p. 128.

<sup>63</sup> See Açıkgöz 2022, pp. 185-186.

<sup>64</sup> Emre 2014a, p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> Bilâ 1999, p. 214.

<sup>66</sup> Emre 2014a, p. 128.

<sup>67</sup> Erim 2021, p. 818.

factions. Overall CHP elite's inability or indifference to include labour movement due to rigid anti-communism and context of military intervention to politics curbed the party's shift to the left. Only after being forced by anti-communist actions of the right, the CHP had to declare that it was a party on the left. Even after that, there were many in CHP who wanted "left of centre" to be a mere unfortunate episode.

### 2.3.2. An internal dispute over ideology, voter-base and policy-making

After the electoral defeat of 1965, the CHP was torn between its conservative, centrist, and progressive wings, with İnönü engaged in a difficult balancing effort. The former wing – represented by cadres like Ferit Melen, Coşkun Kırca, Orhan Öztrak and led by Turan Feyzioğlu, who would launch various oppositional initiatives within the party administrative bodies and the parliamentary group<sup>68</sup> – contested the discourse of the left of centre as electorally detrimental and contrary to the ideology of the CHP, and its promoters as too much leaning towards socialism and communism<sup>69</sup>. Centrists such as Satır and Erim kept a low profile and followed İnönü with occasional calls for removal of extreme-wings from the CHP<sup>70</sup>. The last group, consisting of younger party elites and intellectuals who possessed more progressive, centre-left or socialist inclinations (Ecevit, Orhan Birgit, Mustafa Ok, Selahattin Hakkı Esatoğlu, Nermin Neftçi and Aksoy among others)<sup>71</sup>, pushed for ideational change, in the sense of a review of CHP's founding principles and programs more towards vote-seeking, moving away from elitism, and more attention to the needs of workers and peasants who were the majority of Turkish population. İnönü, who throughout the first half of the decade was mostly concerned with protecting the democratic regime and its values<sup>72</sup>, started to worry

<sup>68</sup> Most notably, he organized and led intra-party opposition initiatives in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress (1966), leading a group called "76'ers" (*Yetmişaltılar*), and in the 4<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Congress (1967), leading the "63'ers" (*Altmışüçler*) in the parliamentary group and "the Eights" (*Sekizler*) in the Party Assembly.

<sup>69</sup> Kili 1976, pp. 222-225; Uyar 2017, pp. 205-217.

<sup>70</sup> Uyar 2017, p. 218.

<sup>71</sup> Güneş kept a position of observer according to Öner (1976, pp. 50-1) in the initial period, and became active in this faction after the 18th Congress in 1966.

<sup>72</sup> Ugur Cinar, Acikgoz, Esen 2023, pp. 6-7; Kili 1976; 227-229.

more about the competition against the AP. While reiterating the firm non-communist stance of the CHP in all the intra-party discussions and factional clashes, İnönü started to support the group of party cadres and intellectuals who promoted the left of centre discourse that seemed capable of bringing the much-needed ideological refreshment. It is in this context, those supported left of centre started to consolidate from a group of people sparsely put together around a discourse to an actual intra-party movement. Supported by İnönü himself, the LoC movement obtained a decisive victory over Feyzioğlu's conservative faction (which accused the CHP of having cut its ties with kemalism, and Ecevit's group with communism) and started to threaten İnönü's position as the chairperson. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1966<sup>73</sup>, left of centre group won the majority in the party assembly, and Ecevit became the new Secretary General of the CHP.

The fact that Feyzioğlu's wing left the CHP after the congressional defeats of 1966-67 to establish the Reliance Party (*Güven Partisi*, GP) did not curb the debates in the CHP over its ideology and the meaning of "left of centre", because the stronger left-wing overtones of its new electoral platform brought by the LoC Movement did not result in electoral victories. On the contrary, as the elections in 1969 saw the CHP's vote share shrink by 1%, new discussions were ignited by the centrist faction. The main demarcation line regarded the ideological shift of the CHP. First, such an issue occurred when some of the left-leaning members of the LoC Faction started questioning the NATO membership of Turkey during a parliamentary group debate. Güneş had signed a petition for Turkey to leave NATO and Toker wrote in his column that there were communists in the CHP. İnönü himself intervened and stated that Turkey should indeed stay in the NATO with amendments to its agreement with the organization<sup>74</sup>. The second issue was the reinstatement of the labour movement to the CHP and the labour quotas. When the LoC Faction pushed union representatives as mayoral and parliamentary candidates in Ankara and İstanbul in 1968 Local Elections, the centrists voiced their concerns<sup>75</sup>. The final point regarded kemalism, and a heated debate occurred over Ecevit's speech on

<sup>73</sup> Uyar 2017, pp. 256-263.

<sup>74</sup> Öner 1976, pp. 279-281; Neftçi 1997, pp. 123-132; Mülayim 2019, pp. 227-229; Erim 2021, pp. 865-867.

<sup>75</sup> Ulus 1968; Erim 2021, p. 874.

Atatürk's Memorial Day in November 1969<sup>76</sup>. This issue also strained the relationship between the "Yön" movement and the CHP.

The revival of the ideological debates within the CHP paralleled the growing left-right tensions of the end of the decade that flared up throughout Turkey. After the defeat of 1969 elections for the CHP, the leftist intelligentsia lost all its hopes for a change in power via parliamentarism. Ecevit and the LoC started to come under attacks from the extreme left both polemically and literally. During the Congress of the Teachers Union of Turkey in 1969, Ecevit and socialist LoC Faction member Esatoğlu were beaten by a group of leftist students who accused them with being collaborators of the US<sup>77</sup>. Some of the most prominent leftist protagonists of these tensions were also directly in contact with CHP groups: for example, it was the case with Deniz Gezmiş, who led the appearance of a group of the far-left organization *Dev-Genç* to confront Ecevit<sup>78</sup>, in the congress of the CHP's Istanbul local branch in June 1970, in support of the candidate backed by Satır<sup>79</sup>. İnönü claimed that the instigator of the event was the former military putschist and CHP MP Orhan Kabibay<sup>80</sup> who worked as one of the connections between the revolutionary left and the radicals in the CHP.

Once again, the left-right tensions in the country – that from the universities (especially after the global '68 movement) overflowed in street violence and claimed prestigious victims<sup>81</sup> – and especially the coup by memorandum of 12 March 1971, worked as a watershed for the CHP. The LoC Movement was once again standing on the one side

<sup>76</sup> In his speech Ecevit refused non-parliamentary politics and reformulated a well-known Marxist motto "Base will determine the superstructure" as a call for "revolutions at the base level". See, Ugur Cinar Acikgoz, Esen 2023, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Uyar 2017, pp. 322-3.

<sup>78</sup> Dev-Genç was an organization directly evolved from the university organization called the Federation of Idea Clubs which was close to the TİP. The organization broke away its ties with the TİP due to the party's parliamentarianism and renamed itself as such in 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Milliyet 1971, p. 144.

<sup>80</sup> İnönü 2020, p. 865.

<sup>81</sup> The far-left revolutionary groups organized various clamorous actions between 1971 and 1972, including the abduction of US and NATO military personnel and the assassination of the Israeli consul Efraim Elrom, in retaliation against the repression of the left and its militants, some of whom – most notably Deniz Gezmiş – were sentenced to death. Against this decision also İnönü and Ecevit protested and gave their vote in parliament, in a debate that exemplifies the extreme left-right polarization of those years, as the MHP and AP leaders Türkeş and Demirel expressed their favour to the capital punishment.

of a debate with the centrist faction of the CHP over the support to the military coup, the stance towards the leftist revolutionary movements, and the accusations of leaning towards socialism and communism. İnönü, after receiving threats of abolishment of the parliament from the military, put his (and CHP's) priorities behind regime guardianship and the protection of the Republic, opting for the dialogue and appeasement with the armed forces to prevent them from closing the parliament down and establishing a complete military rule<sup>82</sup>. Ecevit and his faction strongly opposed this decision. Ecevit's resignation from his post of General Secretary of the CHP on 21 March was the biggest symptom of the rupture between the chairman İnönü, and his group that still held the majority in the party organs. This meant for İnönü placing tacit support for Erim's prime ministry and openly siding with Satır's centrist faction to curb the hold of Ecevit and the LoC Movement in the ruling bodies of the CHP. Ecevit in return managed to get the support of Kırkoğlu's left-wing, his own group, and a new group of academicians from the University of Ankara (most notably Deniz Baykal, Besim Üstünel and Ahmet Yücekök, and Güneş acting as an elder), the so-called "Mülkiye Junta"<sup>83</sup>. After a bitter rivalry the control of the CHP was eventually won by the LoC Movement. İnönü resigned from chairmanship after failing to push a vote of no confidence for Ecevit's group in the 5<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Congress on 8 May 1972, and Ecevit's faction continued its hold over the party. He became the third chairman of the CHP on 14 May and led the party to the electoral victory of 1973.

As discussed above, the 1960s presented two-pronged pressures of the Cold War binary over the CHP, which was slowly but surely moving towards the centre-left. On one hand, as a modernist and increasingly pro-labour unit of Turkish politics, the CHP became the target of the Turkish right, which used anti-communist sentiments as a staple tool against the CHP. On the other hand, far and extreme-left saw the CHP as either a threat to itself or as an enemy. The radical left student movement did not refrain from physical attacks or interfering in the factional competition of the CHP. The 1960s showed that the centre-left position was under crossfire in Turkey and when the CHP came at odds with the US interests in the region it became easier to use

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<sup>82</sup> Kili 1976, p. 282.

<sup>83</sup> Emre 2014b.

the anti-communism card for the Turkish right. Any potential challenges to establishment in a NATO country which was bordering the USSR, even if it came from a more tame and moderate-left wing party which was also openly anti-communist, were being kept in check.

#### **2.4. Conclusion: yet another leftist “victim” in the Cold War?**

This chapter highlighted how the CHP’s ideological journey towards its left-of-centre stance was marked by internal strife, external pressures, and the intricacies of Cold War politics. The party’s ability to navigate these challenges defined its role in Turkish politics during a transformative era, illustrating the complex interplay between ideology, internal dynamics, and the international context. The case-study hereby presented demonstrated how the more classical ideological debates of the international environment of the Cold War intertwined with those specific to the Turkish context, ultimately shaping a distinctive ideological solution within the CHP. Furthermore, it shows how left elsewhere than Europe struggled with the binary ideological alliance conditions.

The centre-left in Turkey sprung out of a strict anti-communist political and ideological lineage, kemalism. After WWII, the CHP openly kept the course of Turkey towards the West. It acted as anti-communist agent and suppressed the fledgling left which sought friendly relations with the USSR. This had the added effect of putting pressure on the newly rising DP. However, during the 1950s, the DP as the governing party turned the weapon of anti-communism towards the CHP which resisted its rising authoritarianism. Doing so the CHP opened itself up to issues of social equality, social security and labour rights, and appealed to a new generation of politicians. In the post-coup environment of the 1960s, left-wing political track appeared as a political alternative for the rapid need for development, and a group from the younger generation of CHP pushed in that direction. Their ideas were under development since the 1950s and called for an anti-communist centre-left. This brand of left brought together socialism/social democracy of European left and kemalist experience of the CHP to avoid the taint of communism in the eyes of the political community. This idea and its carriers received flak from its ideological rivals since its

inception. Moreover, differences over class-based politics, tactical preferences (namely military involvement in politics), as well as generational and left-leaning policy and cadre implementations pushed away left-kemalist intelligentsia and divided the CHP itself. First breakouts in 1967 openly tried to link the LoC with socialism, and communism. The factional exodus of 1973 was significant as it marked cadre renewal and revolved primarily around diverging understandings of the kemalist tradition and class-interests. The LoC insisted on reaching the popular classes and shifting its position over cleavage axes to stop being a party of “the elites” and relying on “democratic forces”<sup>84</sup>, thus pushing away a significant portion of the old CHP elites and voter base significantly in 1969 elections. Between 1965 and 1977 the CHP managed to capture urban and agricultural labour-intensive provinces and its votes dramatically increased<sup>85</sup>.

CHP’s tenures in power between 1973-4 and in 1979 saw increased US disgruntlement and involvement in Turkish politics due to the Poppy-seed and Cyprus crises. Such decisions, while feeding into Ecevit’s political appeal<sup>86</sup>, debilitated the Turkish economy along in the aftermath of the 1973 petroleum crisis in the long run. With rising violence in the streets and under economic pressure, the Ecevit’s minority government collapsed in 1979. Ecevit’s failure was partly due to loss of state capacity and factionalism in the institutions. However, according to Kakizaki’s research, Ecevit had fallen out of favour with the military due to his exposure of NATO-backed counter-guerrilla operations in Turkey<sup>87</sup>. This led to the inability to stop left-right conflict as well as to intervene and persecute those responsible for massacres in Maraş and Malatya. The reasons of failure for Turkey’s anti-communist centre-left, in the late 1970s, stemmed from internal ideological and class conflicts, as well as a detrimental political environment that led to an external coup. General lack of culture of democratic engagement<sup>88</sup> and intense factionalism, when combined with the rigid anti-communist stances of the Turkish right and centrist parties, created a harsh environment for the democratic left in Turkey like elsewhere in Latin

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<sup>84</sup> Ugur Cinar, Acikgoz and Esen 2023, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Cinar, Ugur Cinar, Acikgoz 2022, pp. 2013-218.

<sup>86</sup> Ugur Cinar, Acikgoz, Esen 2023, pp. 12-3.

<sup>87</sup> Kakizaki 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Samim 1987, p. 84.

America<sup>89</sup>. When this environment was influenced by the US in favour of the right and controlled by the security apparatus in a NATO country, it became extremely difficult for the centre-left to survive, even if it was genuinely anti-communist.

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<sup>89</sup> Iber 2013; Smaldone 2010.

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**Fulvio Bertuccelli** is a researcher on the political and cultural history of Turkey and a literary translator from Turkish into Italian. He has held the position of research fellow in History of Eastern Europe at Sapienza University of Rome, as well as that of adjunct professor of History of Islamic Countries at the University of Bologna.

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