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**POLITICS OF DISCONTENT
IN THE MIDST OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION:
THE FREE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF TURKEY (1930)**

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In the 1920s, Turkey was hard-pressed with difficulties on both the international and the domestic levels. The fledgling republic was isolated in international affairs, other than its friendship with the Soviet Union (Gürün 1991, pp. 103-32), and its borders were still far from being consolidated (Psomiades 1962, pp. 112-35; Newman 1927, pp. 81-83, 173-77). The Kurdish rebellions in the east, the top-down modernization efforts of the nationalists, and the ongoing settlement problems of many Turkish-Muslim immigrants who came from Greece through a population exchange, created uncertainty and instability within the country (Zürcher 1993, pp. 173-82).

Two further trends contributed to the rising discontent in Turkey at the time: the exclusionary politics of the ruling nationalists and the economic failure brought on by the Great Depression. The former had started with the shutdown of the Progressive Republican Party in 1925 and continued with the purges following the discovery of an assassination plot against the president in 1926 in Izmir, which put an end to the political opposition (Zürcher 1991). The depression began to exert pressure through declining prices on the world market. This especially affected the population of the commercialized regions where raising cash crops was the dominant economic pattern.

Within this atmosphere of distress, Mustafa Kemal surprised many in 1930 when he initiated the creation of the Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), formed under the leadership of former prime minister Fethi Okyar. The new party was relatively short-lived, however, despite the fact that the party deputies were nationalists whom the president trusted implicitly (Tunçay 1992, pp. 245-73).

Readers of modern Turkish history have interpreted the "FRP experience" as a loyal opposition movement and have attributed both the party's formation and its dissolution to conflicts within the nationalist political elite (Weiker 1973). This analysis, strengthened by the

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memoirs of the FRP founders, has given rise to a classic account with little empirical depth regarding the history of the FRP beyond the experiences of the party deputies (Okyar and Seyitdanlıoğlu 1999; Ağaoğlu 1994).

This paper aims to expand the understanding of the social history of the party by bringing social actors other than the nationalist political elite into the story, by using accounts in local newspapers within a political economy framework.¹ Three questions crucial to understanding the party will be the focus: Why was the FRP founded? Who supported the new party? And why was it closed so suddenly?

Emphasis will be given to the effects of the Great Depression on Turkey as one of the primary reasons for the founding of the FRP.² Then, the identities of its supporters in Anatolia's commercialized regions will be examined in detail. Accordingly, the events leading up to the end of the party will be reconstructed, concentrating on the mass support of the FRP.

1. The Effects of the Great Depression on Turkey, 1927-1930

The structure of the Turkish economy in the newborn republic of the 1920s was almost the same as that of the late-Ottoman economy (Keyder 1982). It still concentrated on commercial agriculture and trade. While its coastal regions continued to produce cash crops for world markets with increasing specialization, the peasants of Central Anatolia were establishing closer relations with the internal market through grains.

Big cities and large towns, as they had been under the empire, were centers of trade with their hinterlands directed toward either the foreign or the domestic market—the difference being that the right to trade in some sectors had been given to state monopolies to raise revenue for the state and to promote private accumulation (Hershlag 1959, pp. 67-69). Premature industrialization, still artisanal in character, was concentrated in the food and textiles sector, with limited technology and workforce concentration (Yavuz 1995, pp. 95-125).

¹ Most of the newspapers covered in this paper are inclined to identify themselves as "the voices of the opposition" in their own localities.

² Other explanations regarding the establishment of the FRP that concentrate on different forms of discontent emerging from the political sphere and/or the social/demographic makeup of the Turkish Republic are also valid arguments which need to be analyzed in greater depth.

As foodstuff prices began decreasing on the world market, Turkey became engulfed in a deep crisis after 1927 (İlkin and Tekeli 1977, pp. 29-155). Large trade deficits and balance-of-payments problems emerged as a result of plummeting export values, but also because of the obligations of Ottoman debt payment (Rothermund 1996, pp. 74-81).

The Great Depression in the Countryside

Meanwhile, the countryside was suffering from the depression. One contributing factor was the price gap. Foodstuffs were cheaper in the countryside compared to the cities and the world market (Hatipoğlu 1936, pp. 33-42). Furthermore, the value of manufactured goods in Turkey did not decrease as much as the prices of agricultural goods, meaning a loss of both relative and absolute income for the peasantry. Internal terms of trade were against agriculture, with a decrease of 35 percent in 1930 compared to the averages of 1927-28 (Tezel 1994, p. 426). Taxes also contributed to worsening conditions in rural areas. The land tax and the livestock tax became major burdens, as they stayed constant in value or even increased during the era.³

Acquiring credit became the peasants' primary means of coping with the crisis. The Agricultural Bank, the institution responsible for extending agricultural credit in Turkey, did not even come close to satisfying the needy peasant. The bank distributed less than a quarter of the necessary amount of credit in 1930 (Atasagun 1943, p. 287). In addition to the limited amount, the credit was difficult to acquire and only available on a short-term basis.⁴ The number of bank branches was limited,⁵ and the bank tended to give credit to merchants instead of farmers, a fact heavily criticized in the newspapers.⁶

Consequently, local banks developed hand in hand with the emerging cooperative movement, attempting to finance commercialized fig,

³ For instance, the contribution of the livestock tax to the budget doubled between 1924 and 1929, reaching 6.2 percent in 1929; see Hershlag 1959, p. 51. Temporary taxes such as the road tax, the transaction tax, and the airplane tax also increased the burden.

⁴ For the widespread criticism about the operations of the bank, for instance, see *Yeni Asır*, 23 December 1930.

⁵ There were constant calls to expand the network of the bank to the villages. See *Babalık*, 17 April 1930.

⁶ As an example, Ali Naci Bey acquired 35,000 Turkish liras from the bank as credit, thanks to close relations with political figures, and aimed to lend the money at higher interest rates. See *Yarın*, 27 August 1930.

grape, and tobacco producers in Western Anatolia and wheat producers in Central Anatolia. However, the contributions of these banks remained insufficient for the needy rural folk (Atasagun 1940, pp. 63-73, 112-15).

The only remaining alternative for the miserable peasant was usury capital. Contracted loans had interest rates as high as 150 percent per annum (Atasagun 1943, p. 166), typically forcing the indebted peasant to sell his means of production to the lender, who might be the merchant who bought his produce or the town merchant from whom he bought manufactured goods (Tökin 1990, pp. 146-51). Hence, the more the depression lowered prices, the more the peasants fell into the debt trap. As a result, newspapers of the day carried more and more frequent announcements of farmland auctions by private individuals as well as the Agricultural Bank.⁷

Crises in Urban Settings

The Great Depression in the cities was closely linked to the developments in the countryside. As the intermediary agents responsible for taking the produce from peasants to urban markets, the merchants carried the crisis to the urban sphere. Many bankruptcies and even a suicide⁸ were reported in the press due to shrinking markets and declining prices on the world market. The merchants mainly attributed their losses to expensive railroad fares and harbor trade-monopolies.⁹

The workers, mostly concentrated in the port cities, were also negatively affected by the disruption of the traditional commercial relationship that connected the peasantry and the merchants. As the depression worsened, the merchants and the factory owners reduced salaries and increased job insecurity, attempting to shift the burden to the workers.¹⁰ Unwilling to accept the new conditions, the working

⁷ Even the government-sponsored daily *Anadolu* in Izmir printed continuous news about the auctions or rental of parcels of land by the Agricultural Bank that peasants had provided as collateral on their loans. See *Anadolu*, 19 December 1930.

⁸ An anomie suicide was reported in Izmir when Alaattin Bey, a merchant, killed himself because of his unpaid debts to the state. See *Yarın*, 19 August 1930. At the same time, the narrowing markets were a cause of criticism from the merchants. See *Edirne Postası*, 26 February 1930; *Anadolu* 12 and 17 June 1930.

⁹ See *Anadolu*, 12 and 17 June 1930; *Edirne Postası*, 26 February 1930.

¹⁰ *Hizmet*, 29 September 1930.

class responded with strikes that exploded in 1930, especially in Izmir, the main export city.¹¹ For instance, workers in raisin warehouses joined the fig-workers in the city when they organized a march to voice their demands.¹² The crowd, a thousand strong, protested against the merchant firms for decreasing the payment per layer (*plaka*) from 34 kuruş to 22 kuruş and for attempting to eliminate two -to three workers every day. Ostensibly peaceful, the march ended violently when the security forces intervened, arresting and wounding many workers.

The inhabitants of cities and large towns faced hard times as well. The price of bread was the major issue, with people constantly criticizing local authorities for the high cost of bread. For instance, in Dörtyol, an orange-exporting region in the south of the country, the profiteers (*muhtekir*) were blamed for taking huge surpluses out of the business, as had been the case in Istanbul during World War I.¹³

Taxes made city life difficult for small merchants.¹⁴ In interviews with Izmir residents belonging to various professions, such as taxi drivers and small shop owners, without exception they blamed high taxes for their troubles.¹⁵ In earlier years, the building tax (*müsakkafat vergisi*) had been calculated when rents were high due to the increased demand for housing by the immigrants (*mübadil*) coming from Greece, but values had fallen during the Great Depression. However, the government had no intention of decreasing—let alone eliminating—this source of income, collecting 6,400,000 Turkish liras more in 1930 than in 1928.

The other tax in effect was the income tax.¹⁶ This was especially onerous for those merchants who rented shops and did not have book-keeping accounts, because both profits and losses were taxed. For instance, if a merchant went bankrupt in the seventh month of the year, he was still responsible for the remaining five months of tax scheduled to be paid at the end of the year. As newspaper columnists

¹¹ Izmir was the scene of strikes in 1930. See *Hizmet*, 9 September and 12 October 1930.

¹² *Hizmet*, 9 September 1930.

¹³ *Hizmet*, 12 October 1930.

¹⁴ There were continuous announcements in *Anadolu* that the taxes would be reduced. See *Anadolu*, 30 September 1930.

¹⁵ *Anadolu*, 5 December 1930.

¹⁶ The income tax was introduced in 1926. Revenues generated for the budget in the first year were roughly equal to that of the livestock tax of the same year. See Aydemir 1931, p. 161.

pointed out, if there were no partitioning of debts, shop sales, or sequestration, the prisons would be full of people who were unable to pay the income tax.

Among others, the story of İbrahim Hayri Efendi represents the small merchant's situation at the time. İbrahim Hayri Efendi was running a shop that he had rented in Çulluoğlu Han until he was faced with paying an income tax of 29 TL. Failure to pay would result in imprisonment, a disastrous prospect for the head of a family of 10. İbrahim Hayri Efendi sold what he had in the shop to pay the tax, but he was left jobless (*aylak*), with no option except to ask the state to decrease the taxes by 50 percent.

The Great Depression negatively affected all of Turkey, but especially the regions where market relations were the most developed. Rising social discontent became the undisputed reality in these regions, exerting pressure on the ruling nationalist elite (Aydemir 1966, pp. 385-87). The president's response to the economic crisis was a political one: establishment of a party to voice the demands of the discontented citizens but at the same time to serve as a tool close to him that would channel the opposition to the Parliament (Soyak 1973, p. 411).

2. Waves of Support: The FRP at the Grassroots Level

The Free Republican Party came into existence legally on 12 August 1930; its program was announced to the public the same day.¹⁷ The FRP program, focusing on the economic problems of the country, was concise and policy-oriented (Tunaya 1952, pp. 633-35). The Free Republicans targeted high taxes and blamed the government for spending too much on such infrastructure investments as railroads. Other aspects of the program appealed more directly to the social groups suffering the greatest hardships. Criticism of state intervention in the economic field took into account the demands of city merchants who were not allowed to compete against state monopolies in many sectors. The peasantry was on the agenda with the demands for reform at the Agricultural Bank to give more and low-interest credit, with the aim of eliminating usury capital. The problem of the marketing, transportation, and protection of export crops was another item that united the interests of the merchants with that of the commercialized peasantry.

¹⁷ *Yarın*, 12 August 1930.

Local Branch Development in the Commercialized Regions

Immediately after the party program became known to the public, mass support for the FRP began to surge from the commercialized regions, rapidly becoming a grassroots movement. It soon became clear that the stronghold of the party would be Western Anatolia, where party branches were springing up like mushrooms, with Izmir at their center.¹⁸ The city branch was set up within a matter of days¹⁹ after the arrival of Fethi Okyar on 5 September 1930, at the start of his Western Anatolia tour,²⁰ soon followed by branches opened in other towns throughout Izmir Province.²¹

Manisa, an important city in Izmir's hinterland famous for its grape and tobacco production, was also quick to host the new party. Raşit Bey, the head of the Peasants Union, set up the branch in Manisa; the other administrative members were lawyers and doctors.²² The branch worked tirelessly to introduce the FRP to the region and to attract members. Within two weeks, the branch registered 6,000 members,²³ a result similar to that experienced in the outlying towns of Manisa Province.²⁴

To the south of Izmir lay the cities of Aydın, Muğla, and Denizli, each with developed towns sprawling out beyond their city centers. The Free Republican Party repeated its success in opening up new branches in these locations.²⁵ For instance, in Söke, at the south end of the railroad line from Izmir, the branch was founded by Aydınlı Postacıoğlu Kâzım Necip Bey, who had won the trust of everybody in

¹⁸ The FRP established local branches in Karşıyaka, Bornova, Seydiköy, Değirmendere, and Cumaovası within the city. See *Hizmet*, 12 and 23-25 September 1930.

¹⁹ *Hizmet*, 9 September 1930.

²⁰ The tour of the FRP in Western Anatolia will be examined in detail in the following section.

²¹ The FRP established local branches in Seferihisar, Menemen, Ödemiş, Torbalı, Bayındır, Kuşadası, Buca, Bergama, Foça, and Urla. For the identities of its founders and the ceremonial openings of the local branches, see *Hizmet*, 9-30 September 1930.

²² *Hizmet*, 7-9 September 1930.

²³ *Son Posta*, 21 September 1930.

²⁴ For the FRP branches in the towns of Kasaba, Salihli, Alaşehir, Kula, and Gördes, see *Hizmet*, 9-25 September 1930.

²⁵ The FRP opened branches in Nazilli, Bozdoğan, Yenipazar, Çine, Kemeraltı, and Milas. See *Hizmet*, 11-29 September 1930; *Son Posta*, 13-14 September 1930.

the town.²⁶ Among the other administrative members were Kemal of Cretan origin, the pharmacist Halil Bey, and Çakmakzade Emin Kâzım Bey. The Söke branch registered 500 members within the first 24 hours. Within a week, the number reached 2,000.²⁷

Along the Black Sea coast, the FRP began taking shape in Samsun under the retired military commander Şefik Avni, a brilliant organizer. The administrative members of that branch included the lawyer Bahri Bey, the pharmacist Reşit Can Bey, and the doctor Osman Bey.²⁸ Bafra, a rising economic star thanks to tobacco, also welcomed the new party; its branch was founded with Cennetlikzade İbrahim Bey as its head. The dentist Yekta Bey and the lawyer Yusuf Kemal Bey were the administrative members, along with four others.²⁹ While the Trabzon branch had a ceremonial opening,³⁰ the atmosphere in Amasya was tense before the arrival of Avni Bey, the regional organizer of the Free Republican Party.³¹

Meanwhile, the FRP was improving its grassroots structure in the south of the country, notably in the city of Antalya. Coupled with the efforts of Burhanettin Bey, a well-known doctor in the city, the branch became so active that crowds of 1,000 to 1,500 attended the speeches delivered by members such as Burhanettin Bey and Akif Bey.³² The activities of the new party also increased east of Antalya, where the fertile Adana plain hosted the new party in Silifke, Mersin, and Tarsus.³³

Eastern Thrace, a center of immigrants from the Balkans and a region producing for the Istanbul market, welcomed the new party too, with Tosun Bey as its organizer in the region.³⁴ Hayrettin Bey, president of the Edirne Bar Association, the lawyer Celal Bey in Kırklareli, and the dentist Ahmet Rıfıkı Bey in Uzunköprü established the branches of the new party.³⁵ In Vize, the head of the local branch was Dr.

²⁶ *Hizmet*, 22 September 1930.

²⁷ *Hizmet*, 26 September 1930.

²⁸ *Son Posta*, 26 September 1930.

²⁹ *Son Posta*, 28 September 1930.

³⁰ The Free Republican Party had 4,000 members, as opposed to the 600 members of the RPP. See *Son Posta*, 3 December 1930.

³¹ *Son Posta*, 20 October 1930.

³² *Son Posta*, 11 October 1930.

³³ *Akın*, 23 and 29 September 1930; *Yeni Adana*, 7 October 1930.

³⁴ *Hizmet*, 27 August 1930.

³⁵ *Edirne Postası*, 5 September 1930.

Kemal Bey, while all the other administrative members were merchants.³⁶

In Central Anatolia, local branches of the Free Republican Party were opened in Konya and Eskişehir.³⁷ In Konya, the city branch was founded by M. Faik Bey, president of the Turkish Hearth (*Türk Ocağı*) in the city, and by former teacher Remzi Bey.³⁸ The branch became so successful that it registered more than 3,000 members before the municipal elections in October 1930.³⁹ In Konya, the organizers even began to publish a party newspaper, *Duygu*.⁴⁰

The local branches of the Free Republican Party developed rapidly in the regions where those involved in commercial agriculture and trade faced tremendous hardships because of the Great Depression. However, the party founders definitely emerged from two tiers. The doctors, pharmacists, and lawyers—the literate elite dissatisfied with the narrow political boundaries of the Republican People's Party—had their seats in the administrative cadres, while the merchants, who had been burdened with the declining world market prices, joined them. Recent immigrants were also eager to take their places among the party cadres as their settlement and land ownership problems continued in 1930. On the lower tier were the commercialized peasants in the villages and towns and "suburban" areas who were struggling to survive the depression with no government help. Hence, they strongly supported the party, as is clear from the number of members that the local branches attracted in such a short span of time.

The FRP Tour of Western Anatolia

Mustafa Kemal soon "suggested" that Fethi Okyar embark on a tour of Western Anatolia, where the discontent was especially on the rise. The tour would make the opposition visible and at the same time give the Free Republican Party the opportunity to bring the opposition under its umbrella. The trip started in Izmir, where the party deputies received enormous support from the moment they arrived in the city,⁴¹

³⁶ *Son Posta*, 30 September 1930.

³⁷ *Hizmet*, 17 and 22 September and 1 October 1930.

³⁸ *Akın*, 12 September 1930.

³⁹ *Hizmet*, 29 September 1930.

⁴⁰ *Son Posta*, 25 September 1930.

⁴¹ The number of people gathered in the Izmir port to hail the FRP deputies reached 40,000 by the time the ship became visible. See *Hizmet*, 4-5 September 1930.

the big event of the day being the speech of the FRP leader at Alsancak Stadium.⁴²

In his speech, Fethi Bey devoted considerable time to the issue of taxes that increased both the cost of living and the cost of production. The high taxes made it difficult for Turkish goods to compete in foreign markets. He declared that the economic wealth of the citizens had to be improved and that the taxes should not exceed the level of each citizen's economic capacity. This was a direct response to the government's presentation of high taxes as a technical issue when taxes in fact shaped its fiscal policy⁴³ and its decision to sponsor the expensive railroad-building program.⁴⁴

Okyar then presented the party position as that of economic liberalism, according to which the state had the role of developing the infrastructure in order to help individuals act for themselves economically, unhindered by obstacles.⁴⁵ This perspective was a clear sign that the new party sided with the city dwellers as well as the commercialized peasants on the issue of government monopolies. Fethi Bey strongly criticized the port monopoly for inhibiting competition and locking up a sphere of the economy for its own profit. The sugar and gas monopolies received mention because of the high prices they commanded thanks to their protection from foreign markets. The crowd at Alsancak Stadium, delighted with this speech, burst into applause.

The tour of Western Anatolia would include not only the big cities but also towns along the way that had railroad stations.⁴⁶ The next day, Fethi Okyar and his colleagues boarded the train to visit

42 *Hizmet*, 7 September 1930.

43 To understand the effects of the taxes, Fethi Bey urged the prime minister to consider the people who had gone bankrupt and been imprisoned because they had been unable to pay their taxes.

44 If the perspective of the government continued, the leader added, the citizens would be bankrupt economically, which would lead to unpaid taxes and render the railroad building project nothing but a slogan. Thus, Fethi Bey recommended that the limits for the rail issue be set according to the economic capacity of the citizens. See *Hizmet*, 8 September 1930.

45 This was a direct response to Prime Minister İnönü, who had declared to the public in his Sivas speech that the RPP was mildly *étatist*.

46 The first stop on the tour was Çiğli railroad station. The peasants were waiting on the platform with flags. Unable to pass through the crowd, the train stopped and Fethi Okyar emerged from the train. He shook hands with the people and accepted the milk and eggs the peasants pressed on him as the crowd shouted, "Save us from this misery, our votes are yours!"

Manisa.⁴⁷ A large crowd greeted the train when it reached Menemen station.⁴⁸ The leader was presented with salt, bread, water, and a plate with a note on it extending the best wishes of the population. In the card was an appeal for help: "The population of Menemen are experiencing difficult times and we are here to show this, but the military forces are trying to make us disperse." Fethi Bey responded with great enthusiasm to the crowd that had come to see him under such difficult conditions.⁴⁹

The next stop was Manisa, where the city residents, joined by the peasants from the surrounding areas, greeted the delegation at the station with drums and horns.⁵⁰ Fethi Bey spoke to the crowd, emphasizing the party program: The FRP aimed to increase the wealth of Turkey's citizens, defend free trade, and oppose the port monopoly that profited from public revenues. The leader went on to speak of the specific problems in Manisa. It was the goal of the FRP, he declared, to work for the benefits of the grape producers who worked the rich Manisa Plain. He asserted that if the state wanted to continue collecting revenues, it should not exploit the economic power of the grape producers through the trade monopolies. He noted that the interest rates of usury capital in the region were as high as 100 percent, making it impossible for the peasants to survive. Fethi Bey insisted that the Agricultural Bank had to come to the aid of the peasantry.

The next stop for the Free Republican Party officials was Aydın, a region of fig producers. As with the Manisa trip, the train stopped at small towns en route.⁵¹ After stopping in Selçuk, Reşadiye, and Germencik, they beheld a sad scene at the station at Erikli.⁵² A young man spoke movingly, depicting the situation of the peasantry: "Look at these peasants living in hunger and without shoes; the state cannot be everlasting (*payidar*) if this situation continues. Our only request is that when you become the government, that you do not forget the situation of the peasantry and your promises regarding them."

After one last stop, at Karapınar station, which also was crowded

47 *Hizmet*, 8 September 1930.

48 *Hizmet*, 9 September 1930.

49 "We are so happy to see you. Our aim is to raise your standard of living and wealth." The people replied, "We know about your program. That's why we are here."

50 *Hizmet*, 9 September 1930.

51 *Hizmet*, 10 September 1930.

52 *Son Posta*, 11 September 1930.

with people, the train reached Aydın, its destination. A band was there, and drums and horns held forth. The residents swarmed to the station; many were in tears. In his speech in Aydın Palas, Fethi Bey first thanked the inhabitants of the city and added that he was happy to see that the party was the result of real need.⁵³ He said: "The depression has affected [people] everywhere, it is true. But the depression that has to be solved is within the country. The FRP wants free trade and is against the monopolies that pressure the peasantry." Fethi Bey then moved on to the issue of credit. He criticized the Agricultural Bank for not extending enough credit, thus forcing the peasantry to borrow at rates as high as 100 percent. He urged the banks to increase the amount of credit to the peasantry (*rençber*), and this, too, drew great applause.⁵⁴

The return trip to Izmir was equally lively in terms of the mass support shown at the railway stations.⁵⁵ The next morning, the train departed from Izmir for Balıkesir.⁵⁶ En route, as the train pulled into Akhisar station, most of the townspeople appeared. Fethi Bey stood up to present a speech outlining the party program and responding to the criticisms leveled at the party. After declaring liberty as the main principle of the FRP, Fethi Bey continued: "Our party was founded to search for solutions for fighting the depression. Hence, our primary aims are to do away with the obstacles that oppress the peasantry and to abolish the port monopoly. We will not deal with the wearing of the fez, or the abolition of all taxes. Our concern is nothing but to find solutions to the Great Depression. Our country is rich and its people are hard working. They deserve to have more wealth and, at the same time, more leisure." He stepped down amid a groundswell of applause.

When the train arrived in Balıkesir, no one was inside the station because of extraordinary measures implemented by the local authorities. However, outside the station, the people had gathered to hail the new leader. The big event was a speech given by Fethi Bey the following day in the stadium, attended by thousands.⁵⁷ Fethi Bey thanked everyone and called for freedom of trade and a decrease in the taxes

53 *Hizmet*, 10 September 1930.

54 *Son Posta*, 11 September 1930.

55 The train stopped in Germencik, Erbeyli, Selçuk, Tepecik, and Torbalı, where Fethi Bey and his delegation found great interest from the local populations gathered in the stations.

56 *Hizmet*, 12 September 1930.

57 *Hizmet*, 14 September 1930.

that consumed the economic power of the citizens. He suggested that the government save more by abolishing the port monopoly that was hurting trade and the workers. The alcohol and beverages (*müskirat*) monopoly had to be reorganized to protect the interests of the grape-growers. Another concern was the high cost of living brought on by steep sugar and gas prices. He called for decreases in the high taxes implemented on these goods. The Agricultural Bank needed to be reorganized, he said, to allow the peasants to acquire credit on easy terms and at low interest rates.

The western tour of the FRP made it evident that the many requests for party membership applications were based on solid reality and desperate need—that the massive support for the new party was not without cause. The people saw the new party as their opportunity for rescue from their economic misery, and they voiced their demands in the railway stations, the only channel then available to them to affect the politics of the day and thereby effect change.

The Municipal Elections

After the FRP's Western Anatolia tour, the next big event to measure mass support was the municipal elections, which began in late September 1930 and continued into October. The elections marked various "firsts" in the history of the Republic of Turkey. It was the first one-degree election, giving the right to vote to peasants. Non-Muslims were presented as candidates in the Free Republican Party lists.⁵⁸ And finally, the elections were administered under the new Municipality Law, which established new rules.⁵⁹

According to these rules, the names of the voters would be posted on lists where they resided. The voters were to check for their names on the lists. If their names were not there, they were to state the situation in a petition to the local authorities.⁶⁰ Everyone older than 18 who had been residing in the election district more than six months would be eligible to vote in the elections. Voters were required to carry their identification cards with them.⁶¹

The elections were held for 502 municipal posts. The FRP partici-

58 *Hizmet*, 7 October 1930; *Hürriyet*, 7 October 1930.

59 *Hürriyet*, 28 October 1930.

60 *Hizmet*, 23 September 1930.

61 *Hizmet*, 26 September 1930.

pated in 37 provinces,⁶² with successful results in 42 locations, of which two were cities.⁶³ Western Anatolia again yielded the lion's share of FRP victories. The FRP triumphed in the cities of Izmir and Aydın⁶⁴ and won places in the immigrant-settled regions—eastern Thrace and the southern Marmara.⁶⁵

In the north of the country, the Free Republicans were proudest of the Samsun election (Weiker 1962, pp. 164-83). While they won the municipality of Samsun, the success became more meaningful when they claimed supremacy over the Republican People's Party in the nearby towns of Merzifon and Ladik. The Free Republican Party had high hopes for the Adana plain, but, according to official results, the only two locations where the new party had the upper hand were the city of Silifke⁶⁶ and Boğaç in Osmaniye.⁶⁷

The municipal elections provided a clear sign that the Free Republican Party had considerable success in commercialized regions despite a limited amount of time to organize. In fact, the support for the new party was much greater than the official results show, given the many irregular measures implemented by the RPP to hinder the victory of the Free Republicans.

3. Politics of Pressure:

The Response of the Political Elite to the FRP

The municipal elections at the same time marked the zenith of social pressure and oppression against the Free Republican

62 The FRP was, however, practically nonexistent in the east of the country, where the Kurds were densely populated. See *Son Posta*, 23 October 1930.

63 The number of seats the FRP won in the elections is still not fully known. The above nonofficial figure was calculated through careful investigation of the newspapers, complemented with literature on the FRP. For the results of municipal elections, see *Son Posta*, 18-25 October 1930, and also Yetkin 1997, p. 194.

64 Bergama, Kınık, Seferihisar, Şereflihisar, Şirince, Urla, Buca, Bademiye, Armutlu, Dikili, Kuşadası, Menemen, Atça, and Armutlu, all of which were within the borders of Izmir Province. The same was true for Germencik, Gördes, Söke, Karapınar, Nazilli, Umurlu, Bozdoğan, Çine, Yenipazar, and Sultanhisar, all towns in Aydın Province.

65 The public chose the new party in Pınarhisar, Vize, Keşan, Lüleburgaz, Kırklareli, and Malkara in eastern Thrace. In southern Marmara, the FRP was successful in Biga (Çanakkale) and Armutlu (Bursa), as well as in Bandırma and Susurluk, both towns of Balıkesir Province. In addition to these places, citizens of Burgaz and Maltepe in Istanbul voted for the new party.

66 *Akın*, 27 October 1930.

67 *Son Posta*, 14 October 1930.

Party.⁶⁸ Focusing its election campaign on the "non-Republican elements" among the supporters and the grassroots of the FRP, the government party "informed" the public that reactionary forces filled the ranks of the FRP. The RPP alleged that the FRP was working hand in hand with communists, non-Muslims, and low-class people whose united aim was to do away with the republic, to return property to the Greeks, to demand the use of the Arabic alphabet and the wearing of the fez.⁶⁹

Two big incidents that aroused public interest involved a green flag in Istanbul and a poster in Arabic script in the Adana branch of the Free Republican Party. The green flag, traditionally associated with Islam, appeared first in the newspapers supporting the government party. The flag had been seen in the election place in Kasımpaşa in Istanbul. *Milliyet*, *Vakit*, and *Cumhuriyet* dailies had no doubt about the nature of the incident: "This was a sign of the reactionary movement that was connected to the new party."⁷⁰

The scenario of reactionary threat was trumpeted once more a few days later when a poster in Arabic script was photographed at noon in the FRP branch in Adana.⁷¹ While the FRP branch staff was out for lunch, someone put the poster in a suitable place and quickly took a photograph. According to the government-aligned newspapers, the poster was evidence of the treachery of the reactionary movement, although no information was provided about the content of the poster or who had taken the photograph.⁷²

Akif Bey, an RPP deputy, "advised" the people not to follow Fethi Bey because he encouraged communists to join the party.⁷³ The accusations were so powerful that a columnist in *Son Posta* felt the need to defend the city of Samsun, where the FRP had won the local election, and the FRP branch to prove that no one was bolshevik.⁷⁴ The accusations against the FRP were usually leveled in general terms, such as

68 For the criticisms of the FRP about the election irregularities on the national level, see the Parliament speech of Fethi Okyar in Öztürk 1995, pp. 339-403.

69 For the aggressive RPP campaign in various locations, see *Son Posta*, 7, 11, 16-19, and 21 October 1930.

70 *Son Posta*, 12 October 1930. After a brief investigation, it became clear that the green flag in question held by teenagers belonged to the Haliç Youth Athletics Team (*Haliç İdman Yurdu*). See *Son Posta*, 16 October 1930.

71 *Son Posta*, 17 October 1930.

72 *Yeni Adana*, 11 October 1930.

73 *Son Posta*, 21 October 1930.

74 *Son Posta*, 3 December 1930.

this declaration in *Milliyet*: "Fethi Bey is working with thieves, smugglers, communists, reactionaries, and people with no known identity."⁷⁵

The RPP accelerated its "enemies of the Republic" campaign when the Free Republican Party gave places in their lists to non-Muslim candidates.⁷⁶ The RPP pushed this issue especially in Western Anatolia and Thrace, where immigrants were settled and the FRP had become very powerful. In Izmir, a rumor circulated that the FRP would allow the Greeks to return to Turkey to claim their assets. This allegation was strengthened with the distribution of a booklet entitled *Announcement of the Turkish Intellectuals of the Country* [*Memleketin Türk Münevverleri Beyannamesi*]. Night watchmen secretly left copies of the booklet at citizens' doors.⁷⁷ While the election was occurring in the city, news of a more speculative nature occupied public opinion in Izmir: "The Greeks of Chios were celebrating the victory of the FRP, which they thought was beneficial to their interests."⁷⁸

The exclusionary campaign of the RPP against non-Muslims continued in eastern Thrace, too. In Tekirdağ, the RPP propaganda had two features: the offer of the much-loved local drink *rakı*, and the threat that the Free Republicans would invite the Armenians and Greeks to take back their property.⁷⁹ In Şarköy, Mürefte, famous for its wine, the campaign of the RPP was that "the Free Republicans would take back the *gavur* [infidel]."⁸⁰

Istanbul, the center of the remaining Greek population, experienced similar activities. For instance, Hoca Murat Efendi, a wealthy man of religious character, explained to the residents of Kemerburgaz that they should not give their votes to the new party because the FRP was the party of the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews.⁸¹ The zenith of the anti-FRP campaign in Istanbul was the declaration by Yahya Galip Bey of the Republican Party that the FRP was the "party of the apostles."⁸² İsmail Hakkı Bey, head of the Istanbul Free Republican

75 "Fethi Bey, yankesiciler, kaçakçılar, hüviyeti malum olmayan kişiler, komünistler ve mürtecilerle çalışıyor." See *Son Posta*, 7 October 1930.

76 The FRP had 22 non-Muslim candidates in its lists. Thirteen of them were from Istanbul, five from Edirne, and the rest were from Izmir. See Bali 1999, pp. 182-85; 1997, pp. 25-34).

77 *Son Posta*, 16 October 1930.

78 *Hürriyet*, 16 October 1930

79 *Son Posta*, 19 October 1930.

80 *Son Posta*, 18 October 1930.

81 *Son Posta*, 12 October 1930.

82 *Son Posta*, 11 October 1930.

branch, rejected this idea outright the next day at the opening of the FRP's Kuzguncuk branch.⁸³ But the RPP continued to attack the non-Muslim candidates in every possible instance. The flags and slogans of the RPP at the polling places proclaimed that the new party was a tool of the "enemy."⁸⁴

In addition to these propaganda efforts, the bureaucratic apparatus was responsible for changing the course of the elections on behalf of the government party. The officials used a variety of tactics to secure the victory of the RPP. The basic strategy was to omit the names of Free Republicans from the voting lists.⁸⁵ If this did not work, the identification cards of Free Republican voters were examined in detail for any discrepancies that might allow their removal from the lists of those eligible to vote.⁸⁶

Big cities and large towns required more aggressive intervention. Any time they became aware of a possible FRP win, the local authorities decreased the number of voting places⁸⁷ and the number of people allowed to vote per day⁸⁸—all this with the help of the military and the police. As a result, thousands were left outside the polling places with no chance to vote.⁸⁹ When support for the new party was still visible at the polling places, the elections were postponed for some time.⁹⁰

The irregularities continued inside the polling places. Individuals close to the RPP sometimes either voted more than once or spoiled the votes of nonparticipants in the elections.⁹¹ Ballot boxes were "lost," stolen, or in some cases kept at the house of a government official. Again, these methods were implemented with the physical backing of the police and the military. Hundreds of citizens were arrested for

83 *Son Posta*, 12 October 1930.

84 *Son Posta*, 17 October 1930.

85 The citizens in Balıkesir complained about the state authorities, who "forgot" to put their names on the lists although the same officials had no difficulty in finding them for tax payments; see *Hizmet*, 7 October 1930.

86 *Son Posta*, 20 October 1930.

87 *Son Posta*, 8 October 1930.

88 For the cases of Adana and Mersin, see *Son Posta*, 18 October 1930.

89 Citizens in Konya were demanding their right to vote. See *Son Posta*, 20 October 1930.

90 For instance, the elections were postponed in Aydın, Çine, Biga, Ereğli, Kula, and Ödemiş.

91 An interesting idea emerged from a reader of *Son Posta* who suggested the printing of the names of those who had voted in the elections. See *Son Posta*, 15 October 1930.

"propagating against the law,"⁹² while Antalya was the scene of a battle between state authorities and its own citizens (Güçlü 1994).

The election irregularities and the oppressive RPP campaign were not without reason. The RPP leaders had become alarmed by what they had seen during the FRP's Western Anatolia tour and the grassroots development of the new party; the FRP was mobilizing the masses to an extent that had never occurred in Turkish history. The government party tried to confront the FRP social base in the elections with two basic tactics: delegitimizing the party with the slogan of "non-Republican elements in the FRP" and implementing active oppression with the help of the state apparatus.

Encountering irregularities in the municipal elections, the FRP deputies faced a difficult choice. They could either continue with the social base of the FRP, composed of discontented groups, or stay with the ruling nationalists of which they had been a part. Although they never accepted the accusations regarding their party and its supporters, the deputies of the FRP chose the second option and closed the party on 17 November 1930, abandoning thousands of angry, disappointed followers.⁹³

4. Conclusion

Starting with the second half of the 1920s, times became tougher for millions of people in Turkey after agricultural prices began declining worldwide. Furthermore, the ruling nationalists had been restricting political liberties within and outside the Republican People's Party. The solution of president Mustafa Kemal to the rising discontent became a political one: the initiation of the Free Republican Party to hear and voice the demands of the troubled citizenry.

The response to the new party was unexpected in terms of its degree. Thousands of people rushed to the newborn FRP, especially in the commercialized regions, organizing an unprecedented grassroots movement in Western Anatolia, eastern Thrace, the Black Sea coast,

92 For the arrested Free Republican supporters or branch members in Mersin, Salihli, Trabzon, and Ödemiş, see *Son Posta*, 20 and 22 October 1930; Emrence 1999.

93 In the interviews of *Son Posta*, many people criticized the decision of Fethi Okyar. The reaction to the FRP leader was much harsher in Western Anatolia. For the interviews, see *Son Posta*, 19 November 1930. For the situation in Western Anatolia, see *Son Posta*, 20-23 November 1930.

and the Adana region. This support was clearly visible during the FRP tour of Western Anatolia as well as in the later municipal elections, in which the party won a considerable number of municipalities in the commercialized regions despite the oppression organized to destroy it.

The ruling elite, threatened by local branch development and the scenes of mass support they saw during the party tour, implemented a two-fold plan against the FRP in the municipal elections. While propaganda efforts focusing on the theme of "non-Republican elements in the FRP" were aimed at delegitimizing the party, the interference of the bureaucratic apparatus through every possible means guaranteed the victory of the government party.

The Free Republican Party supporters and the local branches protested the widespread irregularities in the elections through petitions, street marches, and other means, with no satisfactory results. The only change the elections brought to the politics of Turkey was the decision by FRP deputies to dissolve the party. Facing the irregularities, the party center in Ankara, composed of nationalist political elite, chose the side of their class, abandoning thousands of FRP supporters.

The political elite, rid of the Free Republican Party, once more became the sole rulers of the country. With time, state-led industrialization in the economy, one-party domination in politics, and the creation of semi-autonomous organizations in the public sphere opened the way for the nationalist cadres in the government to rule and to disseminate their ideas.

However, the short-lived Free Republican Party experience suggests that the other social actors, such as literate elite on the periphery, the merchants, the commercialized peasantry, and the small working class all had their part in the history of the day. The political sphere, seemingly under the hegemony of the nationalist political elite, had been opened to challenge during the difficult years of the Great Depression.

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**THE CHILDREN'S PROTECTION SOCIETY:
NATIONALIZING CHILD WELFARE IN
EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY**

Kathryn Libal*

"Song of the Children's Protection Society" (*Himaye-i Etfal Türküsü*)

Oh, Homeland! Homeland! Homeland!
It is these Turkish children
Who protect you, who make you shine,
Who increase your renown.

Oh, Nation! Nation! Nation!
It is these Turkish children
For whom you wished happiness
And created this great state.

It is these Turkish children
Who walk, crawl,
Who adorn your homes
Who await nurturance and assistance.

It is these Turkish children
For whom assistance should be endless.
Do not distinguish rich from poor,
They are all your eyes, your heart, and your equals.

It is these Turkish children
Who will be the guardians of the country tomorrow,
Armed with science and ammunition,
The grandchildren of the Grey Wolf.

-Aka Gündüz, 1929

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