

DRAFT FOR DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND CONSTITUTIONALISM  
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*The Anatomy of a Riot: Political Violence, the Birth of Multiparty Politics and the  
Destruction of Tan Press, December 4, 1945*

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On the morning of December 4, 1945 a large group of young Turkish citizens, many of them students at Istanbul University, numbering in the thousands, paraded through the city, arriving ultimately at the publishing house responsible for Turkish language daily *Tan (Dawn)*, which was operated by Zekeriya and Sabiha Sertel, the French-language *La Turquie*, operated by the poet and novelist Sabhattin Ali, and later at a Russian-owned bookstore. The mob proceeded to destroy each building's insides, tossing its contents into the street and wrecking their printing equipment. My goal in writing this is to attempt to provide the fullest understanding of what precisely happened that day. In order to do so I will provide a comprehensive overview of differing narratives provided by observers and those involved. These narratives include the perspective of one of the participants, the Sertel's themselves, Istanbul's press and the United States Department of State through the archival records of its Istanbul Consulate and Ankara Embassy.<sup>1</sup> Having related as deeply as possible the most relevant and available narratives of the events of December 4, 1945, I will show how these different narratives present the precise ways in which the ideological and political lines were being drawn surrounding this event. As will be

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<sup>1</sup> Critically absent in this list is the perspective of the Turkish state, whose records on this matter are largely unavailable at the present time. As will be shown, however, some strong assumptions can be drawn based on other evidence that the Turkish government played a significant role in creating this highly theatrical and symbolic event.

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008) p. 1-2

<sup>3</sup> This relationship has been explored by a number of different scholars, but for the purposes of this essay I am following the lead of Samuel J. Hirst who has addressed not only the geostrategic elements of this partnership, but their ideological underpinnings in

apparent from reading these narratives, different political and intellectual camps both inside and outside of Turkey read the ideological symbolism differently. What I will offer in the analytical section of this essay is to suggest that the riot itself, its orchestration, its provocation and the response to it, was an attempt by the Turkish state to clearly, and violently, demarcate what the acceptable spectrum of political ideologies would be in the new multi-party system. Furthermore, I suggest that this process of cordoning off “acceptable” and “unacceptable” represents a real shift in the nature of the Kemalist ideology that had dominated Turkish politics for almost three decades.

### **Symbolic Violence and Multi-party politics**

The place of this riot in the history of Turkey in the multi-party period is representative of a process described by philosopher Slavoj Žižek as “symbolic violence”. As Žižek explains, symbolic violence is one of two forms of objective violence, which constitutes

...violence embodied in language and its forms... this violence is not only at work in the obvious—and extensively studied—cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Tan Riot was of course an event that would meet the standards of what Žižek would call “subjective violence”, it is this process of the “imposition of a certain universe of meaning” which I would like to explore in this context. To put a finer point on it, I

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<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008) p. 1-2

argue that this is an instance in which the relation between the uses of subjective and objective, or symbolic, violence is made painfully apparent by the historical record. The Tan Riot, and instances of state violence against leftist political groups in the years that followed, served as a tool of state power to not only limit political discourse but to impose a particular meaning to the transnational political language of the Cold War. Whereas in the single-party period the spectrum of acceptable intellectual and political opposition to the Kemalist center could encompass, or at least tolerate, views from the left and right sides of the ideological spectrum because they had little hope of actually affecting change within the Kemalist inner-circle, during the multi-party period the language of political ideology became officially “loaded” so that the Turkish public knew, for instance, who was communist, that they presented a threat to Turkish sovereignty and were thus an enemy of the state.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the imposition, or perhaps importation, of the transnational political language of the Cold War was a marked shift from the way the Turkish intellectual and political sphere related to such concepts as communism, fascism and liberalism prior to World War II. The era of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s leadership, in addition to being one of state-driven economic, social and cultural reform, was one in which Turkey enjoyed a substantial, friendly relationship with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> While this friendship had deteriorated, at least in the diplomatic realm, long before the start of WWII, the Turkish state still maintained at the close of 1945 many of the same principles

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<sup>3</sup> This relationship has been explored by a number of different scholars, but for the purposes of this essay I am following the lead of Samuel J. Hirst who has addressed not only the geostrategic elements of this partnership, but their ideological underpinnings in “Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: The Meaning of Soviet-Turkish Convergence in the 1930s”.

of *étatisme*, single-party rule, and cultural reformism that had made the original ideological connections between it and the Soviet Union more than just a marriage of geostrategic convenience.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, I argue that it was in part because of this friendship and its remnants that left- and communist- oriented public figures like the Sertels could survive in the public sphere even though they were often outspoken in their opposition to the general direction the state was headed. But, and some ways paradoxically, the fact that introduction of multi-party politics coincided with a drastic geopolitical realignment, in which Turkey completed its transition from the Soviet orbit to “Active Neutral” to full-fledged NATO member, meant that voices which had once represented the opposition to the state could not be afforded a place in the nominally more democratic and liberal political structure.

Ultimately, the period between the end of WWII and the electoral triumph of the Democrat Party in 1950 has been portrayed as a story of the “emergence” of a liberal democracy in Turkey. In his seminal work on modern Turkish history, Bernard Lewis, who has viewed himself as a champion of liberalism, hailed the defeat of the Republican People’s Party in 1950 as that party’s “greatest achievement—a second revolution, complementing and completing that earlier revolution out of which the Party itself had sprung.”<sup>5</sup> Another self-professed champion of liberalism, Ahmet Emin Yalman, saw the election as “probably the first instance in history when an absolute power yielded, without violence, to the will of the people freely expressed by secret ballots which were honestly

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<sup>4</sup> Turkey’s second, and final, five-year plan was initiated in 1939, a year after Atatürk’s death, but was nullified a year later in 1940 due to economic distress in a number of areas, but most significantly in overspending on the military. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* Second Edition (New York: Oxford, 1969) p. 296.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 303

tallied.”<sup>6</sup> Even historians more sympathetic to the plight of the Turkish left, such as one-time Sertel collaborator Niyazi Berkes, have seen the multi-party period as one that represented “laboratory check-tests of the validity... of a secular regime in a Muslim country” and that “...Turkish secularism withstood all of the strains [of obscurantism].”<sup>7</sup> Each of these writers explicitly or implicitly elides the violence and suppression upon which the success of the Democrat Party, which is viewed itself as the success of the multi-party system, was built. Yalman remembered his own dilemma following the Tan Riot as one in which he and the supporters of the Democrat Party needed “to make clear our conviction that public protest against red agitation was right, but that violent suppression was wrong.”<sup>8</sup> Lewis, also reflecting on the Tan Riot, mentions that “There was very little sympathy in Turkey for the Communists and fellow-travellers... On the other hand, there were many who regretted that, in order to deal with them, recourse should have been made to such perversions of democracy as press demagoguery and mob violence.”<sup>9</sup> For these writers, the violence that suppressed and ultimately excised popular and public leftist visions was just that, a perversion or an aberration, rather than a fundamental step towards incubating the eventual successor-party from an ideology that was geopolitically untenable. It is my hope that by reasserting the different contexts and narratives of the Tan Riot as I have above that this historical narrative is disrupted, and that we can come to a better understanding of the way objective and subjective violence

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Turkey in My Time* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956) p. 239

<sup>7</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964) p. 503

<sup>8</sup> Yalman, *Turkey in My Time*, p. 226.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *Emergence*, pp. 309-310

were utilized to shepherd Turkey into the American-led western, liberal orbit at the outset of the Cold War.

### **The Riot's Anatomy**

The story of the Tan Riot, known popularly in Turkish as the *Tan Olayı*, has been told from many different perspectives, but there is no existing account that pulls all of the accessible memories and archives together.<sup>10</sup> In recounting as many narratives of the event as are available, I hope to construct what I call a “historical anatomy” of the event. Such an approach bears a resemblance to what has been known as “microhistory” for some time.<sup>11</sup> In much the same way as a microhistory often does, I will provide several detailed perspectives on the event through a variety of sources, each mediated to one degree or another by the circumstances of their documentary genre. By considering these degrees of mediation in the analysis of the narrative on whole, I follow Carlo Ginzburg in the quest to create a history in which “the hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties [become] part of the narration; the search for truth [becomes] part of the exposition of the (necessarily incomplete) truth attained.”<sup>12</sup> But, in the interest of emphasizing the very way each of these narratives are mediated by, among other things, memory, political

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<sup>10</sup> *Olay* in Turkish carries with it a number of different meanings. It can generally refer to any event or occurrence as such, but often carries a connotation of an unusual or even troublesome character. For instance, when paired with the verb *çıkarmak*, it means “to make trouble” as in *olay çıkarmaz* (“don’t make trouble”). I have chosen to translate it here as “riot” both for its aesthetic qualities (“The Troublesome Event at Tan” is obviously clunky) and for the reflection of the fact that this was a mass, public event whose outcome was, at least to some extent, violent.

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of the intellectual history of the term “microhistory” see Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It” trans. by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Autumn, 1993) pp. 10-35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24

realities, media, art and literature I have chosen to analogize the history of this riot in a way that bypasses any overarching narrative – that of an anatomy.<sup>13</sup>

In the sense that the history of this one event is like a cadaver awaiting a first-year American medical student for dissection, I will reveal throughout the course of this chapter as many layers of narrative flesh, ideological organs and mediated carcinoma as I am able. If successful, I hope to provide a way of thinking about the relationship between different varieties and strands of history that tend to single out one or another aspect of the event as part of a bounded whole – a body – that only thrives when all are working together, but also persists even when certain parts are revolting against it. Many of the memories that shed light on this event are inherently problematic, for reasons that range from ideological bias, personal aggrandizement, faulty memory and geographic and temporal distance from the events themselves. Zekeriya and Sabiha Sertel, two of the prime targets of the most violent aspects of the riot, have provided a narrative in their memoirs that place themselves in the position of victims of intense fear-mongering and violent attacks, and while they were in fact very much the focus of intense anti-communist feeling, their memories of the precise events that took place on Ankara

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<sup>13</sup> Surely, I am not the first historian to make use of an anatomical analogy in order to comprehend, or pretend to analytical exhaustion, the history of a particular event or series of events. Perhaps the most prominent example is that of two works on the Vietnam war by the New Left historian Gabriel Kolko. In constructing studies of a decades long conflict and its outcome, Kolko might have loosely understood the history of that war to have been itself a body with its own inertia and agency in the sense that it was driven by ideology and constrained by political, military and diplomatic structures. In assessing the history of a much smaller event like the Tan Riot, while attempting something of a comprehensive history, I am interested in taking this analogy a bit more directly than merely presenting an exhaustive account and calling it an “anatomy”. Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: Pantheon, 1985) and *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Caddesi on December 4, 1945 are mediated by the mere fact that they received reports on the events over the phone, while hiding in their flat on the opposite side of the Bosphorus. Orhan Birgit's first hand witnessing of the events presents its own problems, since his memoir was published sixty years after the fact and after he had made personal and ideological amends with the Sertel family. More contemporary source material from the Turkish press, from the US State Department Archives, or even the minimal information from the Turkish state archives, present a variety of viewpoints with their own set of ideological biases and mediated perspectives. By understanding and presenting these narratives and sources along with analysis of their mediation we can come to a more clear understanding of what the anatomy of this riot was, even as we acknowledge the faultiness of several of its individual parts.

*Orhan Birgit: The Participant's Perspective*

I begin with one of the only published accounts available of a participant in the riot, that of Orhan Birgit, a journalist and lawyer who was a law student at Istanbul University at the time of the riot. Birgit remembers the students assembling that morning for a lecture from Professor Hüseyin Naili Kubalı when an “auburn-haired student whom we knew to be from one of the upper classes” entered the room, spoke with the Professor and began to read from a recent editorial by Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın published in *Tanin* entitled “Rise Up Oh People of the Nation!” [Kalkın Ey Ehli Vatan!]. The student, who he later learned was named Tahsin Atakan, “added his own words to the article, saying that the Sertel's *Tan* newspaper was communist propaganda and that we were all going to gather in Beyazıt Square.” He was then hurried along with the crowd to the nearby Beyazıt Square, no more than two or three blocks from his classroom, where a crowd was

forming with large signs, placards and flags. He noted that one group had come straight from the nearby Covered Bazaar, and had gone first to the Nuruosmaniye Mosque outside the bazaar, indicating that they might have identified as religious. Another group in the crowd consisted of students from the military training, economics, literature, and medicine departments. As the crowd began to process towards Çağaloğlu, where *Tan* was located, a group of artisans joined in as they passed the ancient Çemberlitaş just outside of Beyazıt.<sup>14</sup>

The rhetoric of the crowd, according to Birgit, was generally nationalist as many were requesting Turkish flags and onlookers had begun to intone the verses of Turkey’s national anthem, “The Freedom March” (“*İstiklal Marşı*”).<sup>15</sup> As the crowd moved in the direction of Sirkeci, headed first for the Tan building, Birgit described his position in the crowd, both in terms of location and his own political growth, “I wasn’t at the very front, nor was I among those at the back. I was counted among those rows watching from the middle of the crowd. This was my first meeting.<sup>16</sup> I did not regret going. I was one of those who were not thinking about what would or would not happen.”<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Birgit likens his own memory of the event as that of participant-observer. Whether we can credit that to the fact that his politics had certainly changed in the sixty years since the event or his true objectivity, is hard to say, but what follows certainly colors the event as a nationalist plot with cooperation of the government.

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<sup>14</sup> Orhan Birgit, *Evvel Zaman İçinde* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 2005) p. 31.

[SOMETHING HERE ABOUT NAMIK KEMAL]

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 32

<sup>16</sup> I have chosen to translate this term as “meeting” since the Turkish term “miting” is a close cognate, though more often this term is used for very large gatherings or protests (i.e.: the May 1919 Sultanahmet Mitingleri) as opposed to the more common word for a small “meeting”, “toplantı”.

<sup>17</sup> Birgit, p. 32

As the crowd passed the printing houses of the brothers Hakkı Tarık and Asım Us, Birgit remembers seeing the silhouette of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, one of the more religiously conservative figures of the Istanbul press and a vocal anti-communist. Birgit remembers the crowd, upon noticing Kısakürek, shouting in appreciation.<sup>18</sup> Soon they would come upon the *Tan* building. In Birgit’s telling, and this is corroborated somewhat by the Sertel and State Department narratives, December 1945 saw the Sertels taking aggressive measures to claim the new Democrat Party for the political left. By proclaiming that the founders of the new party would write for their publication *Görüşler* (*Opinions*), covering the early youth meetings of radical groups lead by Alaattin Tiritöğlü, and taking a generally leftist line during WWII, the Sertels, according to Birgit, “were leftists, but their views often overlapped with communists and extremist elements of the party.”<sup>19</sup>

Birgit, clearly sympathizing with the Sertels in retrospect, narrated the events of the attack on *Tan*,

Those who were provoked by the meeting broke the windows of the *Tan* building, and a short while later entered the building. People climbed the building as high as the roof and destroyed whatever they could find; reams of paper were thrown

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 33. The issue of whether or not Zekeriya or Sabiha Sertel were ever members of the Turkish Communist Party or any such affiliate is hotly contested by surviving members of the Sertel family and those who knew them. The facts remain that for their opponents, they were one of the utmost symbols of the communist party in Turkey, along with their close friend, and certain party member, Nazım Hikmet. A CV from the Comintern archives translated into Turkish, and housed at the Turkish Foundation for Social History Research (TÜSTAV) claims that Sabiha Sertel had been a member of the suppressed Turkish Communist Party as early as 1934, but the document is riddled with numerous factual errors so can only be taken at face value. Following the fallout of this riot, they found themselves exiled to the USSR in Eastern Europe and, eventually, Baku, Azerbaijan. TÜSTAV “Novik Yoldaşa – İlmühaber” January 6, 1943, 495.266.23.2

out on the street and drifted as far as the ferry port in Sirkeci [a distance of roughly four city blocks], the rotary machine was broken.<sup>20</sup>

From there, the crowd advanced over the Golden Horn towards Taksim Square. Along the way, the offices of the French-language publication *La Turquie* (which was also associated with the Sertels) were destroyed. The crowd then marched down Istiklal Avenue towards Istanbul's commercial center in Taksim, at which point Birgit claims he remembered that he had left his coat in the lecture hall and thus retreated to Beyazit to retrieve it.<sup>21</sup>

*Anti-Communist Agitation in the Press: The Cases of Büyük Doğu and Tasvir*

“A country where the shame of the house is the old (Calligraphy) hoca's white bearded grandfather; and the honor is the (Conga) expert's (Dandy) grandson...”

- Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, “A Country that...”

“It is necessary to realize that, once the East washed in the same trough, and in the same trough was the stuff of our personality, the weakness of the East is us, and in our weakness we have also lessened the power of the East by saving face; And that day is today, we are blind to the foreign miners who have extracted our very ores, those ignorant and unconscionable ones who have joined [the West] have come to this situation with faces that are rotting into decay.”

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. The rotary machine mentioned here by Birgit was a special loss for the Sertels since it was a new piece of technology that Zekeriya Sertel had first learned of when he was writing for the *New York Times* in the early 1920s.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. One amusing note regarding this part of the riot's history is worth relaying. Birgit says that while the crowd advanced on Taksim, many of the small shop owners selling charcuteries replaced placards describing their “Rus Salatası” (Russian Salad) with placards describing “Amerikan Salatası” (American Salad). American readers will of course identify this sort of gastro-ideological formulation from the infamous history of “Freedom Fries” in the Capitol building cafeteria, but in this instance it would appear to this author that the original political meaning of the difference between “Russian” and “American” salad in Turkey is all but lost in the current vernacular.

-Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, from the mission statement of *Büyük Doğu*<sup>22</sup>

The brief opening of press restrictions in the spring of 1945 saw the eventual re-entry of several newspapers to the scene in Istanbul. *Tan* and *Tasvir*, whose frequent internecine conflicts over the course of WWII had caused the government to shut them down indefinitely in late summer of 1944, were re-instated in late March, 1945<sup>23</sup> and in November the poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek re-booted his weekly magazine *Büyük Doğu* (*The Great East*) after it was suspended in May of the previous year.<sup>24</sup> As hinted at in the above epigraphs taken from the first issue, Kısakürek's new version of his magazine had a clear political aim of reorienting the populace away from the moral decay of Europe and towards the Eastern, Ottoman, and Islamic heritage of Turkey's past. Though Kısakürek's vision, as he himself was an arch-modernist poet and a former pupil of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, was one that in many ways rejected traditional images and symbols in favor of an incorporation of modernist artistic and poetic styles

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<sup>22</sup> Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, "A Country that..." ("*Bir millet ki...*") and "The Ideological System: Us" both printed in *Büyük Doğu*, Issue 1, 2 November 1945.

<sup>23</sup> Over the course of the war, *Tan* was suspended seven total times for a total of two and a half months, prior to its indefinite closing on 12 August 1944. *Tasvir/Tasvir-i Efkar*, was suspended eight times in the same period, before an indefinite suspension on 30 September 1944. Newspaper suspensions were a very common practice during the war for the İnönü government, for more information see Cemil Kocak, "İkinci Dünya Savaşı ve Türk Basını" in *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 35, November 1986, 29-33. All newspaper closings were conducted under the infamous Article 50 of the 1931 Press Law, and while the *Kararname* announcing suspensions were normally somewhat vague as to the precise infractions of the given newspaper, the *Kararname* announcing *Tan*'s 1944 suspension singled the paper out for "spreading dangerous seeds of discord and provoking dissent amongst the citizenry" ("*...yurt içinde tehlikeli nifak tohumlar eken ve vatandaşları birbirini aleyhine eder...*") BCA Başvekalet Muamelât Umum Müdürlüğü (MUM) 080 19 01 02 106 58 15. The re-instatement for *Tan* was ordered on 22 March 1945, BCA MUM 080 18 01 02 107 106 10.

<sup>24</sup> While daily newspapers like *Tan*, *Vatan* and *Tasvir* resumed their usual numbers, ordering systems, etc. once their suspensions were lifted, the re-arrival of *Büyük Doğu* was in essence a re-launch of the weekly magazine, which started its issue numbering back at one on 2 November 1945.

into modes of Islamic thought. The cover art of *Büyük Doğu* tended to strike a chord that was at once demonizing the West and was reminiscent of European modernist artistic movements, such as Italian Futurism [Fig. A].

Following the riot, *Büyük Doğu* proceeded to champion the cause of the rioters. In the first issue following the riot, on December 7, the cover of *Büyük Doğu* featured a triptych of photographs: a shot of the crowd on Ankara Street holding signs and pictures of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, a photograph presumably taken inside *Büyük Doğu*'s office of Kısakürek with two unidentified university students, a former parliamentarian and reporter for the official Trade Office, Kazim Nami Duru, and a columnist for *Büyük Doğu*, Nejat Mushinoğlu, and lastly a photograph of the crowd surrounding the Monument to the Republic (*Cumhuriyet Anıtı*) in Taksim Square, with the caption “The youth came to us and brought the Communists’ documents.”<sup>25</sup> The following week the cover featured photocopies of several such “documents” purportedly proving the Sertel’s soviet inclinations, including a copy of a Russian newspaper with Zekeriya Sertel’s name penciled on it, a map, in Turkish, of the world where Moscow is circled and lines radiated out to other soviet-friendly nations, a copy of the French newspaper *Le Carrefour* with the headline “Le Choix du 21 Octobre: Mystique Communiste”, and an unsigned letter addressed to Zekeriya Sertel detailing a recent report from a Soviet radio station out of Moscow expressing support for Armenian separatists hoping to join the Soviet Union. The caption for this cover read, “The Documents of *Tan*’s Spirit and Work!”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Büyük Doğu*, 7 December 1945, “Gençler bize geldi ve kömünistlerin evrakını getirdi”

<sup>26</sup> *Büyük Doğu*, 14 December 1945, “Vesikalar (Tan)cıların Ruhu ve İşı”

The issue on December 14 proceeded to recount the events on December 4, and what Kısakürek was doing throughout the day of the riot. According to this report, Kısakürek was alerted to the events in Beyazıt Square at around eight in morning when an anonymous student called his office at *Büyük Doğu*. The student informed him that a protest was beginning in Beyazıt Square and that they were “proceeding against the communists.” After an undetermined period of time, Kısakürek, with Nejat Muhsinoğlu at his side, went down to the *Tan* offices to see what was happening for himself. It appears he arrived there just prior to the majority of the crowd made it to *Tan*. The article mentions that there was in fact a police cordon in front of the office, but that once the crowd arrived the police were either overrun or disbanded since “...within seconds all of the barriers, together with the windowpanes of *Tan*, were torn and strewn about, and *Tan* Press began to shake like a rotten tooth.”<sup>27</sup>

After returning to the business office of *Büyük Doğu* Necip Fazıl was visited by a number of unidentified youths who were involved in the protests. The first group, described as “truly right thinking” and “who were on our side and dependent on our spirit” came to the offices covered in blood, though without introducing themselves or saying much of what they had been up to. They washed in the faucets of *Büyük Doğu* and then left in a hurry. A while later, the article mentions a group of youths had assembled outside the offices of *Büyük Doğu* and began discussing moving the protest against *Akşam* (*Evening*) newspaper. Necip Fazıl greeted them with a few words and the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, “Hadiseler” p. 8

response was, as the article says, “with the strength that could have lifted the wooden building into the air.”<sup>28</sup>

Following this intrusion, two college students, the ones who are depicted on the cover of the December 7 issue [Fig. B], burst into the *Büyük Doğu* offices “with faces like lightning” and a stack of documents and newspapers in their hands. The protestors claim to have found these documents, some of which are published in photocopy on the cover and inside the paper, at the offices of *Yeni Dünya*, owned by the Sertel colleague and poet Sabahattin Ali.<sup>29</sup> After leaving the documents with Kısakürek and taking the aforementioned photograph, the youths left. The article describes the documents published on the front page, particularly the note supposedly written in Zekeriya Sertel’s handwriting, as “unequivocal proof that they were one of the bases for secret communication [for Soviet Propaganda].” After briefly reviewing the documents, the article concludes, “We are immediately delivering these documents to the government, [the documents] are without a doubt proof that [the Sertels] were involved in an organized and systematic struggle, particularly on behalf the Armenians and for Armenianness. We are certainly not on the side of the idea that gives lessons in error, we are not ones who should be held accountable for questions about our loyalties to another country!”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, Sabahattin Ali was the proprietor of both *Yeni Dünya* and the French-language *La Turquie*, these were the second newspaper offices that were sacked on December 4. Ali died under mysterious circumstances three years later, documents concerning the investigation into his death are not available in the Turkish Republican Archives as of yet, though many, especially those on the left side of the political spectrum, believe he was murdered by the state.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, the article also states that the documents were delivered to the Istanbul branch of the Press Directorate, as well as explained to the police.

*The Sertels and the Riot*

It is evident from nearly every account of the riot, including Birgit's, that the Sertels were perceived as arch-communists, bent on co-opting any serious opposition party for the purposes of spreading soviet-style communism in Turkey. Examining the source material from the perspective of the Sertels, as well as from the perspective of American Consular documents, this public perception of the Sertels was at best a gross exaggeration, and at worst utterly and completely false. The question that I wish to explore in the wider history of this riot is how the Sertels came to be painted in such ideologically "red" colors despite their efforts to articulate a new vision for Turkey which was by almost any international standard, liberal and democratic.

In his memoirs, Zekeriya Sertel begins the story of the riot several months prior, not long after the decision to have multi-party by-elections was made. He describes a meeting he had with a close acquaintance, the long-serving foreign minister and soon to be UN representative Tefik Rüştü Aras, regarding the potential for a new party under the leadership of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes. During the meeting, Zekeriya remembers coming to an understanding that the new party should have four guiding political principles: "1. The party must defend the freedoms and rights of the bourgeois. 2. It will be progressive-statist. An attempt will be made to separate private companies from the state. But, they will remain under the control of the state. 3. A Turkish-Soviet

friendship will be fundamental to foreign policy. 4. Turkey will remain independent and pacifist.”<sup>31</sup>

Later that year, following a press conference regarding a new land reform policy, Zekeriya recalls that Adnan Menderes came over for dinner. Following dinner, discussion of the above principles ensued, Menderes asked Zekeriya directly if he was a communist, to which he responded “this was an unwarranted question.. and if I was going to come out against the design of the Land Reform it would be necessary for it to be liberal in meaning.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly, Zekeriya came out of the meeting having got his message across to Menderes, as well as an apparent understanding of the principles he had discussed earlier with Aras.<sup>33</sup>

It was following this meeting that Zekeriya Sertel took it upon himself to go about defending himself and his newspaper from accusations that they represented a communist

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<sup>31</sup> M. Zekeriya Sertel, *Hatırladıklarım 1905-1950* (Istanbul: Yaylacık Matbaası, 1968) pp. 260-261. When considered against what is classically considered to be the political backbone of Kemalism, these pillars do not seem all that controversial. However, by the time this meeting took place, the proposition of Turkish-Soviet friendship would have been practically incendiary given that Turkey’s realpolitik of neutrality throughout the war was largely guided away from the Soviet sphere, and towards the burgeoning American one. As Samuel Hirst has shown, the Turkish-Soviet partnership during the reign of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was built on more than coincidental ideological resonances, and the deep marks it left on culture and economy. Onur İşçi has recently demonstrated the weakness of this partnership in the face of the geopolitical crises of the late 1930s by detailing the diplomatic deterioration following the Montreux Convention and through the course of the war. See Samuel J. Hirst, “Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: The Meaning of Soviet-Turkish Convergence in the 1930s” *Slavic Review* Vol. 72 No. 1 Spring 2013 p. 32-53 and Onur İşçi, “Russophobic Neutrality: Turkish Diplomacy, 1936-1945” Ph.D. diss. Georgetown University, Department of History, 2014

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 264

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, though Sertel states that there was no verbal agreement from Menderes on this point, but that “between them, we were enlightened as to our understanding.” Further, Sertel states that this meeting was a way of testing whether Menderes saw him as a communist in the same way as the “reactionary and fascist press” did.

fifth column in Turkey. Beginning with a column he recalls from October 11, he set about attempting to dissuade the Turkish public that communism was on the march, but did so by measuring Turkey's situation in ways that strike the ear as inherently Marxist. In the article entitled "An open conversation with our readers" Zekeriya tried to explain to the public that, "In order for communism to spread in a country there are objective and subjective conditions that are necessary," and that the Turkish situation, unlike even that of Germany, England, America and France, had not yet exhibited the necessary internal industrialization (*sanayi kurulmamış*), class consciousness (*sınıflar belirmemiş*) or capital accumulation (*sermaye birikimi*) to meet the objective criteria for communist revolution.<sup>34</sup> He further stated that even subjective criteria, such as the broad organization of the working class with a political leadership or the appearance of outward class conflict were undetectable and that "the bourgeois have been deluded into thinking that the current situation in Turkey can be called nothing but communist and that there is a communist threat."<sup>35</sup> Whether or not Zekeriya's analysis could have been proved truthful, it is rather easy to see how this article might not have had the desired effect of disabusing the public of the notion that he was a communist.

In Zekeriya's memory, it was in the interest of further diffusing these accusations of communism that he set about trying to start a new publication that would be the voice of the official opposition party. This magazine, which would be called *Görüşler* (*Opinions*), had begun to be discussed in October and November of 1945. It was to be under the direct editorship of Sabiha Sertel, and, initially at least, Celal Bayar, Adnan

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 264-265

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 265

Menderes and Tevfik Rüştü Aras had agreed to write for it.<sup>36</sup> According to Sertel, the newspaper could ultimately not afford to compensate Bayar, since their budget allotted only five thousand *lira* and at the time Bayar was making more than seventy thousand from his post at the popular bank, İş Bankası.<sup>37</sup> Bayar's position, or perceived position here is key in the Sertels' telling, since he is considered by Sertel to have sold out their cause to İnönü's government in order to be sanctioned as the first official opposition party. Zekeriya, before retelling the precise events of December 4, 1945, relayed that in Radio Moscow was making Bayar out to be an enemy of the Soviets, but that Bayar told Zekeriya directly, "However, as you know, I am Atatürk's man. On his deathbed, I promised to carry out his will as one of my most holy commitments. For that reason I cannot be an enemy of the Soviets," but then Sertel laments, "...after the Democrat Party came to power Bayar had permanently betrayed Atatürk's will and made an enemy out of the Soviets."<sup>38</sup>

According to Zekeriya, *Görüşler* "exploded like a bomb" at its release on December 1, he himself could only retain a single copy of the first issue.<sup>39</sup> The first issue, which ran the headline "Chained Freedom" (*Zincirli Hürriyet*) in reference to the single-party system, had advertised future issues with perspectives from Bayar, Menderes and Fuat Köprülü. The following day, a group of university students gathered outside of *Tan*'s offices and fearing that they were going to provoke violence, Zekeriya telephoned the provincial governor, Vali Lütfi Kırdar, who told him "I know and I have taken the

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<sup>36</sup> [NOTE ABOUT THE DISPUTE AS TO WHO AGREED, WHEN. SEE YALMAN 225-6]

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 266

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 267

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

necessary precautions, don't worry.”<sup>40</sup> The following day, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın published his provocative article, “Kalkın Ey Ehli Vatan” (“Rise up O People of the Nation”), which surprised Zekeriya since he had thought he had relatively friendly relations with Yalçın. Early that morning, an unnamed university student telephoned Zekeriya saying that a group of youths were planning to riot and destroy Tan Press. He again phoned the governor, who said that they would surround the vicinity of the press with police.<sup>41</sup>

Zekeriya describes the riot from his own memory much as if he had been there to witness it, even though he was certainly at home across the Bosphorus in Moda during the entirety of the affair. Nonetheless, he describes the actions of the protestors in harrowing detail, saying that they bore axes, sledgehammers and carried with them bottles of red ink. Upon busting into the Tan offices, he says some of the protestors asked where the Sertels were in hopes that they could arrest them, strip them naked and douse them in the red ink as if to say “here are the reds” (*işte kızıklar*). He insists, perhaps quite rightly, that this wild crowd destroyed the offices with the police as onlookers. Once they were done rampaging the Tan offices, and after they had moved to Beyoğlu to trash the offices of *La Turquie*, Sertel claims that many of the protestors had boarded a ferry to Kadıköy so that they could find them in their home and attack them there. Zekeriya and Sabiha received reports of all of this over the phone, and later called the Vali a third time, incensed and afraid, to tell him, “Are you sure you took the measures that you said you would? Now the fascists are coming to my house. You let my press be destroyed, at least let us avoid the same to our lives.” The Vali then assured them that their life was not in

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 268

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 268

danger as the boat the protestors had boarded was redirected toward the Marmara Islands instead of Kadıköy. When the Vali then asked if the Sertels were still in their house and recommended they stay there, Zekeriya knew this “meant that we could not stay in the house. Our lives were in danger. At this time, we heard a buzzing coming from afar. With each minute, the buzzing sound seemed louder to us. We left our house and took refuge in one of our neighbor’s homes.”<sup>42</sup>

Zekeriya states that after the events of December 4, not a single one of the organizers could be found. He writes that he had no doubt that President İnönü knew that his Prime Minister, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, gave the order to the police to organize and assist in the conduction of the riot, and that there were plainclothes police officers amongst the crowd.<sup>43</sup> Sertel concludes his narrative on these events by relaying a strange instance he experienced a few months after the events. He had purchased a book in Istanbul’s old antiquarian bookshop and a piece of paper had fallen out. The scrap had a note on it addressed to Prime Minister Saraçoğlu and read simply, “My dear sir, I’ve fulfilled your orders, now I am waiting for my reward. Signed: Yaşar Çimen.”<sup>44</sup> He tells us that Çimen was a propagandist for Italian fascism, and had been seen amongst the crowds at the riot – proving to Sertel at least that he must have been one of Saraçoğlu’s contacts for organizing the riot.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 269-270. We know from Sabiha Sertel’s memoir that the neighbor with whom the Sertels took cover was their long-time friend Vâlâ Nureddin, then a columnist for the newspaper *Akşam* (*Evening*), and his wife Müzehher. Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi* (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1969) p. 346

<sup>43</sup> Sertel, *Hatırladıklarım*, p. 270-271, I have translated the phrase *sivil polis* here in a more colloquial term, plainclothes officers, than its direct cognate, “civil police”.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 271

While Zekeriya Sertel’s opinions often garnered suspicion from colleagues and government officials alike, it was often the more pointed and direct opinions of his wife and partner, Sabiha Sertel that provoked a public outcry. The name of the new newspaper that sparked the ire of columnists like Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Görüşler (Opinions)* was in fact the same as Sabiha’s regular column in *Tan*. In the days leading up to the riot, her opinion pieces became increasingly defensive of her and her husband’s newspaper, and increasingly accusatory towards the efforts of the ruling Halk Party (CHP) to silence them. On December 1, her editorial ran with the title “The *İbret* and *Meşveret* Newspapers of this Era”, and compared attacks against *Tan* and the newspaper of their one-time partner Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Vatan (Motherland)* to those of the notorious Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II against the leading lights of the Ottoman constitutional movement.<sup>45</sup> Her editorial of December 2, “The Fear of the Opposition”, she criticized the efforts of the CHP to manage the new opposition parties directly, “...our opposition is defeatist, they are regarded as traitorous... [the CHP] says that those who are not opposed to itself can still criticize the government. Only the pot can call the kettle black.”<sup>46</sup>

Sabiha’s memoir provides further details of how the Sertels spent the day of the riot. Initially, fearing that they would find themselves under attack at their home, they went to the house of Sabiha’s mother, who was seventy-eight years old at the time. They

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<sup>45</sup> *Tan*, 1 December 1945. *İbret* was a newspaper published in the mid- and late-1870s that prominently featured the writing of the Young Ottoman playwright and intellectual Namık Kemal, and *Meşveret* was one of the semi-official organs of the Committee of Union and Progress founded by Ahmed Rıza in 1895, both were subject to incredible scrutiny and censorship from the Hamidian regime.

<sup>46</sup> *Tan*, 2 December 1945. I have translated the Turkish idiom *ha Ali Hoca, ha Hoca Ali* as “only the pot can call the kettle black” to get across the meaning that two things presented here as opposites (ie: the government and the supposed opposition) are in fact the same, a more literal translation might read: “Here’s Ali Hoca, and here’s Hoca Ali”.

stayed there until evening, when all was clear they returned to their house. The following day they were visited upon by their friends and co-workers Vâlâ and Müzehher Nüreddin, from whom they learned of the Istanbul mayor's ploy to send the protestors who had boarded the Kadıköy ferry to the Marmara Islands, and with whom they spent the three days following the riot.<sup>47</sup> While there, Sabiha ruminated on the extreme violence the crowd had apparently wished upon them, "At that time I understood how awful this all was. They had wanted to ensure victory by destroying the press and murdering the owners, they could not be defeated with discussion. In what way could this be the promise of democracy? This was nothing other than fascist terror."<sup>48</sup> Sabiha describes the time spent at their house following the riot to be incredibly tense. They took no visitors after returning from Nüreddin's house save one English reporter, to whom she insisted that, "during the war years, the impact of the assistance provided to fascist Germany by the men of the state against the will of the people was disastrous. And now they are taking an attitude against the progressive newspapers, it gives the impression that democracy will not be established in Turkey for a great many years."<sup>49</sup>

*The American Consular Perspective*

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<sup>47</sup> Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi*, p. 345-6

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 347

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 348. She remembers the reporter responding that he could not tell this story now but perhaps one day he could, but, she wrote in 1969, "That day has yet to come." To be fair to the foreign press, however, the event was reported on by the *Times of London* on a few occasions, the 5 December 1945 issue briefly described an "Anti-Communist Parade", on 7 December the newspaper relayed denials from Ankara that the riot was anti-Russian and who insisted the riot was "spontaneously organized by students, in spite of police, with the intention of asserting the position of the Turkish youth, which is neither Nazi or Communist, but purely democratic." *Times of London*, "Anti-Communist Parade in Istanbul" 5 December 1945, Issue 50317 p. 4 and "The Disorders in Istanbul" 7 December 1945, Issue 50319, p. 3.

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WORKSHOP – DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE WITHOUT PERMISSION

Having established a ground-level narrative account of the events of December 4, 1945 in Istanbul, I will now turn to more of a birds-eye view of the situation based primarily on documents in the US Archives from the Istanbul consulate and the Ankara Embassy. The story from these documents is vital to the story of the Tan Riot for several reasons. First, and perhaps most obvious, the United States had a vested interest in keeping Turkey within its orbit and preventing the spread of communism, and therefore its consulate took a keen interest in the internal political happenings of Turkey, especially at the dawn of the multi-party period, which could be seen as a potential opening for socialist or communist elements in the Turkish public sphere. Secondly, in tandem with the War Office and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the consulates were extraordinarily well-connected to every level of the Turkish government and society, including politicians, journalists like the Sertels and even the Turkish Secret police. As such, there are materials from interviews conducted by the US consulate available nowhere else as well as translations of documents whose originals have either since been destroyed or exist in folios of the Turkish archives that are not yet open to the public. And lastly, it is important to understand the manner in which the United States assessed communist and anti-communist activity in Turkey because it shows us exactly how these two allies saw each other on ideological grounds, and the extent to which fighting communism in Turkey was a joint project.

There are only a few documents that had come to the US consulate through the Turkish secret police that relate to the Tan Riot, but they are critical to building the case that there was a certain level of orchestration on the part of the Turkish government leading up to and through that day. The first is the prominent place given to Zekeriya

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Sertel in a memorandum translated by OSS from the Turkish secret police on Communist activities in Turkey. The memorandum, which was obtained by the Ankara Embassy on October 9, 1945 and forwarded to attaché Richard Gnade and Ambassador Edwin C. Wilson, singles out *Tan* as one of the few newspapers to have successfully survived as a proponent of the communist agenda despite the heavy restrictions of the Turkish censors. Halil Lütfü Dördüncü, a founder of the newspaper along with the Sertels, is described as “a half-ignorant man, whose ambition for earning money is boundless” and the newspaper’s policy “resembles that of the German propaganda system.”<sup>50</sup> The report identifies three main tactics in *Tan*’s supposedly devious propaganda: first to cause a fall out with the government by exaggerating every small grievance and taking an analysis that “supposedly inclines towards the doctrines of Roosevelt but actually almost always towards Marx;” second, by espousing a worldview that is inherently revolutionary and consistent throughout all of the articles, even by placing supposedly Marxist terminology into the paper’s crossword puzzles so that “the definition of Socialism, mostly Marxism, [is put] in terms that even children and women can understand;” lastly by identifying prominent Marxists outside of Turkey and from history in order to teach its readers about the success of Marxism worldwide.<sup>51</sup>

Declassified confidential files from the Ankara Embassy reveal that the US delegation anticipated an increasing anti-Soviet feeling amongst the citizens of Istanbul, and likely saw the Tan Riot at the culmination of an anti-communist movement that was

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<sup>50</sup> United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Ankara Embassy General Records 1936-1963 RG 84/HMS: UD 3287/Box 92/800.b. Despite the pejorative description of Dördüncü, by all accounts the Sertels were in fact the main editorial engines behind *Tan*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

swelling as World War II came to a close. As early as May 1945, the Chargé d’Affaires in Ankara, E.L. Packer, had been in contact with the office of the Secretary of State regarding the ideological position of Turkish informants to the US Consulate in Istanbul relative to the growing rivalry amidst the then-victorious Allied Powers. Packer explains in his report that the “average Turk regards the Russian... as a hereditary enemy” and that “although all through the war there have been a number of Turkish newspapers labeled “pro-Allied” their pro-Allied sentiments extend (with the possible exception of *Tan*) to the United States and Great Britain but not to Russia.”<sup>52</sup> And so as early as May 1945, the US delegation was aware that anti-communist sentiment in the press might be directed specifically at *Tan*.

A further report relayed to the state department offices in Washington, DC expands on the perspective of the US delegation on *Tan* as an intellectual enterprise. A memorandum of conversation between John Evarts Horner, then Third Secretary of the Ankara Embassy, and Frank O’Brien, an Associated Press Correspondent and husband of Sabiha and Zekeriya’s eldest daughter Sevim, characterized *Tan* as a “leftist Pro-Allied and Anti-Nazi newspaper [that] made its chief appeal to the intellectual class.”<sup>53</sup> The memorandum also characterizes Zekeriya Sertel as “the most Americanized in manner of all editors, and comes closest to expressing the reactions of a normal American,” since they had both studied at Columbia a few decades earlier and Zekeriya had visited the US as a guest of the Office of War Information in 1942.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> NARA Classified General Records, Ankara 1936-1958 RG: 84/HMS: UD: 3288/Box 13/800

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, “Memorandum of Conversation” 20 February 1945

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

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In addition to a more specific assessment of the ideological factors at play, the consular archives give us a number of details that are quite a bit more specific than what any of the memoirs are able to give. A cable sent to the Secretary of State, which was then lead by the somewhat recently appointed James F. Byrnes, from Ambassador Wilson on the day of the riot reported the damage done to the presses and bookstores, noting that the policies of each had been “pro-Soviet” and that the crowd had forced establishments to display Turkish flags and scrawled “down with communists” in chalk against streetcars and walls along the path of the protest.<sup>55</sup> Another cable sent at 5 p.m. tells us that the assembly at Istanbul University described by Birgit occurred at around 10 a.m., proceeding from there to *Tan*, then a Russian bookstore and finally to the offices of *La Turquie*, reporting that “all three of which seem to be completely wrecked.” According to this cable, the riot was over by 12:30 p.m. and estimates the size of the crowd from 2,500 to 3,000, though some estimates were reportedly as high as 10,000.<sup>56</sup> The critical details here relate to the suspicion on behalf of the American delegation as to what extent the sitting government or the police may have had in the riot. The cable asserts that Consul General Macatee had “the impression police displayed little energy in dispersing the crowd other than to keep it away from the Soviet Consulate General which was protected in force. He so no outward evidence that agents provacatuers were behind the action.”<sup>57</sup> This evidence suggests that the only interest the government had in managing this affair was to protect against the possibility of international incident.

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<sup>55</sup> NARA RG 84/HMS: UD 3287/Box 92/800.b

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. The estimate of 2,500-3,000 came directly from Istanbul’s Consul General Robert Macatee. A later telegram relaying the coverage of the event in the Soviet organ *Izvestia* suggested that estimates ranged on the day of the event as high as 20,000, but eventually settled, by way of the semi-official Anadolu Ajansi (Anatolian Agency), on 2,000.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

The US delegation assessed the possible causes of the riot in the final cable to the Secretary of State at 9 p.m. that day. The six possible explanations included existential worries over Soviet designs on Turkey and areas of the Middle East generally, the generally “pro-Soviet” line of the newspapers being attacked – especially that of *Görüşler* in which “unauthorized use was made of names of highly respected oppositionists such as Celal Bayar” – and the generally nationalistic character of Turkish youth, which had been fanned by recent editorials by Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, Ahmet Emin Yalman and others in papers such as *Tanin*, *Tasvir*, and *Vatan*. In the cable, Wilson points out the irony that the very article read aloud to students at Istanbul University, written by Yalçın, stressed non-violent tactics in defending Turkey against the encroaching Soviet fifth column, which leads him to conclude, rightly, that “there are of course ugly possibilities in [sic] situation if Soviet Government wishes to exploit them.”<sup>58</sup>

Sure enough, a cable sent to the Ankara embassy from Moscow two days following the riot detailed the response to the event in *Pravda*. The Soviet press organ published a headline regarding “Fascist rowdyism in Istanbul” proclaiming that the “character of the demonstration indicated that it had been prepared in advance by authorities... destroyed quarters and presses of democratic papers... beat members of their staffs and committed other fascist hooliganisms.”<sup>59</sup> This report is the only one to speak of physical violence carried out against the staff of either newspaper. It concludes with a snide reaction to the Turkish reporting on the event, asserting that officials wanted to “depict these outrages as manifestations of some sort of ‘democracy’” and that the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Istanbul police chief described the event as a “patriotic demonstration.”<sup>60</sup> A further report from the Moscow Embassy on December 13 reported on elevated rhetoric against the Turkish state and organizers of the riot in Pravda, which declared the event a “pogrom” and comparing the riot to similar events organized by Hitler, stating the “world well remembers analogous incidents in other countries also accompanied by smashing of democratic establishments and book burning.”<sup>61</sup>

The American archives also chronicle some of the Turkish reaction to the Tan riot, including a transcript of a press conference given by Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu the following day. While the Prime Minister’s speech began with an overview of the ongoing negotiations over the administration of the Straits, his remarks on internal affairs reflected concerns over the review of Turkey’s press laws. He referenced a prior concern of his that although he aimed at making Article 50 of the Press Law more flexible, “obstacles to this may come from journalists themselves,” and that he had since witnessed that “publications directed against the linguistic revolution, against the affairs aiming to purify the Turkish language, violence, anger and indignation prevail instead of moderation and logic...”<sup>62</sup> Saraçoğlu then proceeded to denounce a recent report in *Tan*, authored by Zekeriya Sertel, regarding a rumored investigation into secret foreign bank

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> NARA RG 84/HMS: UD 3287/Box 92/800.2. It should be noted that this transcript as it stands in the archives is in fact a translation from the French version of the report that was delivered by the semi-official Turkish press agency Anadolu Ajansı, as such some of the diction and translation here may be unreliable or at least obscured. An examination of the Turkish version would, for example, reveal whether Saraçoğlu was referring directly to attacks on the earlier Kemalist script reform [*harf inkilâbı* or *harf devrimi*] or more generally to language reforms of the later Kemalist period or even such reforms as İnönü’s efforts to change the Islamic call to prayer [*ezan*] into Turkish.

accounts held by cabinet ministers and other elites in the Republican People's Party, perhaps including the future head of the Democrat Party, Celal Bayar.<sup>63</sup>

### **A Transition to Post-Kemalism? The Tan Olayı and State Ideology**

The period from 1945 to 1950 can be seen as the last, and most successful stage in a series of Kemalist experiments in electoral democracy. While Kemalism as ideology certainly remained a potent, and often dominant, political force in Turkey for decades after the CHP's defeat in 1950, it is important to reflect on this period as a point of transition for Kemalism as an ideology, and the role that the Tan Olayı and other similar instances of mass violence played in said transition. Taha Parla and Andrew Davison have provided some helpful tools of analysis in their study of Kemalist ideology as part of the corporatist "third way" tradition, particularly in regards to their strategies regarding elections and opposition parties.<sup>64</sup> Their study highlights the difficulty faced by many scholars of attempting to square Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's state's varieties of state-driven economy, laicism and positivistic nationalism with the grander ideologies driving the global political situation in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in instances when ideological affinities between one or the other superpower, as with Turkish-Soviet cases before the Montreux convention or Turkish-American cases following the close of World War II, are buttressed by one or the other form of realpolitik.

Early attempts at multi-party elections in Turkey were practically a doomed enterprise from the beginning. While holding regular elections was, as Parla and Davison

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid [FIND THE TAN ARTICLE]

<sup>64</sup> Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, *Corporatist Ideology in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order?* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004)

point out, “among the party’s tasks” despite the view held by the political elite that “neither was the country ready for direct democracy, nor was every Turk capable of serving the ‘high’ interests of the party.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, the formation of opposition parties were on the one hand essential to establishing the Kemalist state’s bona fides as a “tutelary democracy”, on the other hand, in Parla and Davison’s analysis, their solidaristic corporatist ideology rendered opposition parties redundant since the cooption of major political classes and corporations was necessary in order to create the sort of political and ideological unity required by the state’s charismatic leader.<sup>66</sup>

The question of why the generation of political elites that ran the country following the death of Atatürk initiated the transition to a multiparty system remains. Additionally, if we are to follow Parla and Davison’s analysis, are we able to conceive of this transition within the same ideological framework of corporatism? There are a few different possible explanations available here. First, it is clearly evident that as World War II progressed, the İnönü regime had much less success containing or coopting its ideological opponents than had his predecessor. In truth, the ideological convictions of these cultural elites, like the Sertels or Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, had become more energized and pointed in the midst of the global conflagration, and their constant agitation exerted occasional pressure on Turkish diplomatic efforts to stave off encroachment from Russia and Germany.<sup>67</sup> Whereas during the reign of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, geopolitical pressures such as those that İnönü faced were less existent and ideological opposition from leftist, liberal or fascist corners could usually be dealt with in

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 223-4

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 179-181

<sup>67</sup> See İşçi, “Russophobic Neutrality” [page numbers]

less direct ways.<sup>68</sup> From this vantage point, the onset of true multiparty politics in Turkey following the close of World War II could be seen as an attempt to let off the steam, so to speak, that had been building as ideological contention on behalf of competing ideologies throughout the war, all while ensuring that the new party itself would have a fairly limited ideological scope by violently excising elite elements that might be sympathetic with communism. In this view, Parla and Davison's articulation of Kemalist corporatism coheres, but perhaps a bit more weakly, since the two parties were at least initially two sides of the same coin.

A second possible explanation would be that the geopolitical pressures, as perceived by İnönü, would demand that Turkey become a multiparty democracy in order to adhere to the still-nascent postwar international order. Turkey's position as a neutral country in many ways left it in precarious position within the wartime global economy, and it would become increasingly obvious over the course of the late 1940s that the postwar order could provide economic benefits if formerly neutral nations allied themselves closely with one of the two prevailing superpowers. Turkey's alliance with the ascendant United States made a natural fit in light of Turkey's deteriorated relationship with the USSR, but in terms of ideology there was much to sort out. As many American consular documents throughout the course of the war indicate, the United States saw Turkey as a potential valuable ally in a postwar fight against communism, but

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<sup>68</sup> This reality accounts in part for the perception of Kemalism as a "flexible" ideology, not only did it actively incorporate elements from other modernist ideologies, but it allowed for at least some ideological opposition that hewed closer to the likes of those sponsored by the United States, the USSR, Italy, France, Britain or Germany. The story of the influence of these geopolitical relationships on what Kemalism could "tolerate" is mostly absent from Parla and Davison's work, but scholars such as Hirst and İşçi have begun to lay the groundwork of this story from the perspective of Turkey's relationship with the Soviet Union.

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was cautious to come to a conclusion as to where the nation stood on ideological grounds.

The benefits of announcing a new Democrat Party and attendant elections in the wake of the war were many in this regard. While the American diplomatic mission viewed the creation of this system with some skepticism, it is fairly safe to say that the process overall was seen as a sign of Turkey's intent to adhere to the orbit of the United States going forward. Whether or how this game of perceptions factored into whatever role the government played in the Tan Riot is hard to assess at this particular moment, but it is clear that the ties between opposition ideologies and Turkey's friends and foes abroad were, for better or worse, stronger following events that persecuted those that supported, or appeared to support, such ideas.



Fig. A: “This City is Floating Away!!!” *Büyük Doğu* no. 1, 2 November 1945. The balloons are labeled “Adultery,” “Gambling,” “Drunkenness,” “Doubt,” “Theft,” and “Murder”



FIG. B – “The Youth Have Come to Us and Brought the Communists’ Documents!”  
*Büyük Doğu* 7 December 1945. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek is depicted second from right in  
the middle picture, the two protestors who procured the documents to his right.



FIG. C – “As the seasons change, the flowers bloom on Ankara Street: THE IRON FIST  
OF THE MOTHER-IN-LAW” *Tasvir*, 2 September 1945