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## THE INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE AND THE PRESS BEFORE THE MAY 27, 1960 COUP: PRESS-POLITICS RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN CHP MEMBERS AND JOURNALISTS

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### Abstract

This article explores the dynamics between the Democrat Party (DP) and the opposition press leading up to the May 27, 1960 military coup. Following the 1957 elections, the DP sought to exert greater control over interactions between the press and the opposition by establishing the Investigation Commission. The focus of the article is on the surveillance of telephone conversations between members of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and journalists by the DP government, and how this surveillance was utilised as a tool to tighten control over the opposition. The wiretapping not only monitored political activities but also impacted the independence of the press, limiting the public's access to accurate information. The DP's attempts to regulate the opposition and the media weakened the functioning of democracy and restricted press freedom in Turkey. This article analyses the effects of these measures, how wiretapping harmed press-politics relations, and the broader implications for democracy during this period.

**Keywords:** Wiretapping, Investigation Committee, Press freedom, Democrat Party, May 27, 1960 Coup

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## **27 Mayıs 1960 Darbesi Öncesi Tahkikat Komisyonu ve Basın: CHP'liler ile Basın Mensupları Arasındaki Telefon Görüşmeleri Bağlamında Basın-Siyaset İlişkileri**

### **Öz**

Bu makale, 27 Mayıs 1960 askeri darbesi öncesindeki dönemde Demokrat Parti'nin (DP) muhalefet ve basınla olan ilişkilerini ele almaktadır. DP, özellikle 1957 seçimlerinden sonra, Tahkikat Komisyonu aracılığıyla basın ve muhalefet arasındaki etkileşimleri daha sıkı bir şekilde kontrol etmeye çalışmıştır. Makalenin odak noktası, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) üyeleri ile basın mensupları arasındaki telefon görüşmelerinin DP hükümeti tarafından izlenmesi ve bu izlemelerin muhalefet üzerindeki denetim politikalarının bir unsuru olarak nasıl kullanıldığıdır. Telefon dinlemeleri, siyasi faaliyetlerin izlenmesinin ötesine geçerek basının bağımsızlığı üzerinde de etkili olmuş ve kamuoyunun bilgiye erişiminde kısıtlamalar yaratmıştır. DP'nin muhalefet ve basın üzerindeki bu kontrol çabaları, Türkiye'de demokrasinin işleyişini zayıflatmış ve basın özgürlüğünü sınırlandırmıştır. Bu makale, söz konusu uygulamaların etkilerini, telefon dinlemelerinin basın-siyaset ilişkilerine olan yansımalarını ve bu sürecin demokrasi üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Telefon dinlemeleri, Tahkikat Komisyonu, Basın özgürlüğü, Demokrat Parti, 27 Mayıs 1960 Darbesi.

### **Introduction**

Press freedom has been a recurring and evolving theme throughout Turkey's modernization process, reflecting the priorities and challenges of each political era. During the Atatürk era (1923–1938), the press was instrumental in promoting national identity and supporting the revolutionary reforms of the newly founded Republic. In this period, press freedom was subordinated to the state's goals, with anti-regime or socialist rhetoric often resulting in the closure of newspapers (Demir, 2019, p.113). This was not solely a matter of censorship but also a reflection of the state's efforts to establish and protect the foundations of the Republic in a volatile political environment. In contrast, the Democrat Party (DP) emerged as a staunch advocate for press freedom in the lead-up to the 1950 elections, positioning itself as a champion of democratic values against the authoritarian tendencies of the previous era. This stance garnered widespread public and press support, leading to the DP's electoral success (Yılmaz, 2016, p.58). During its early years in power, the DP enacted liberal press laws and introduced the 1952 Press Labor Law, which

guaranteed journalists' socioeconomic rights (Gökçe, 2018, p.24). However, after the 1954 elections, the DP shifted its approach, adopting increasingly restrictive policies toward the press in response to growing criticism (Korkmaz, 2019, p.85).

While the Atatürk era's press policies can be understood within the context of nation-building and reform, the DP's press restrictions were primarily driven by political expediency and a desire to suppress dissent. This divergence highlights the distinct dynamics of press-state relations in these two periods. The DP's transition from a proponent of press freedom to a suppressor of opposition voices demonstrates how political pressures can erode democratic ideals.

From the 1954 elections onwards, the government's intolerance of criticism intensified, leading to the closure of many newspapers and the imprisonment of journalists by the time of the May 27, 1960 military coup (Altun, 2020, p.93). In particular, by April and May 1960, nearly all articles in opposition newspapers were banned (Uysal, 2017, p.45). During this period, the 15-member Investigation Committee, established by the DP, became a mechanism for further intensifying the pressures on the press. The "Law on the Duties and Powers of the Investigation Committees of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey," published in the Official Gazette on 27 April 1960, granted the committee extensive powers, allowing it to overstep constitutional boundaries and begin surveillance activities on the press (Acar, 2022, p.80). These powers included the wiretapping and recording of telephone conversations between CHP members and journalists (Çetin, 2021, p.106). During a period marked by increasing student unrest, the declaration of martial law, and even the censorship of telegrams and letters, telephone conversations between the opposition press and the CHP were fully monitored (Kaya, 2017, p.49).

Towards the end of the 1950s, the Democrat Party government intensified its efforts to suppress growing opposition voices, culminating in the establishment of the Investigation Committee. One of the committee's most invasive practices was

the wiretapping of telephone conversations between members of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and journalists (Gökçe, 2018, p.25). This tactic not only facilitated the government's surveillance of opposition activities but also created a chilling effect on press freedom, severely restricting journalists' ability to critique the government.

The wiretapping operations targeted private conversations, which were meticulously monitored and recorded under government directives. These recordings were used not only to suppress dissent but also to create a climate of fear among journalists, discouraging them from engaging with opposition figures (Korkmaz, 2019, p.87). For example, journalists who attempted to report on CHP rallies or government criticism faced the risk of their communications being intercepted and used as evidence for censorship or legal action. This systematic surveillance eroded the independence of the press, effectively transforming it into a tool for government propaganda. Moreover, the impact of wiretapping extended beyond immediate suppression, as it fundamentally altered the press's role in a democratic society. The DP's actions deprived journalists of their capacity to fulfill their role as impartial informers of the public. Many journalists resorted to self-censorship, fearing retribution if they were perceived as critical of the government. Consequently, public access to unbiased and accurate information was severely restricted, and the press became an extension of state control rather than a platform for diverse perspectives.

The DP's control over the press during this period exemplifies how technological tools, such as wiretapping, can be weaponized to silence dissent and manipulate public opinion. By intercepting and monitoring critical communications, the government stifled not only the voices of journalists but also the opposition's ability to organize and engage with the electorate. This practice set a dangerous precedent, undermining public trust in both the press and the democratic process.

In summary, the wiretapping practices orchestrated by the DP represent a critical turning point in Turkey's political and media history. While they achieved the short-term goal of silencing dissenting voices, their long-term consequences included the erosion of democratic norms, the collapse of press independence, and the normalization of invasive surveillance as a tool of political control. These actions highlight the fragile balance between government authority and the principles of a free press in a functioning democracy. The telephone conversations between CHP members and the press reveal the complex nature of press-politics relations during this period. In response to the DP's repressive policies, the CHP opposition sought closer contact with the press to ensure the flow of information (Altun, 2020, p.92). In this process, the role of the press in mediating between opposition parties and the government, and the difficulties faced by journalists in accessing accurate information, became more pronounced (Şimşek, 2015, p.36). The Investigation Committee's efforts to monitor and control the communication between the CHP and journalists posed a serious threat to the independent functioning of the press, making it risky for journalists to obtain information from the opposition. As a result, the press's freedom to report news and its relations with the opposition became increasingly weakened. With the declaration of martial law in 1960, the freedom of journalists to report the news was severely restricted. During the suppression of student protests, the press faced censorship, and many newspapers were shut down (Arslan, 2021, p.108). The ability of journalists to convey real events to the public was significantly limited by martial law, with many reports subject to censorship, and journalists only able to share information approved by the government (Yılmaz, 2016, p.59). This situation weakened the capacity of journalists to report independently and denied the public their right to access accurate information.

This article employs a qualitative analysis method to examine the political pressure exerted through telephone conversations between CHP members and

journalists by the Investigation Committee and the impact of this pressure on press freedom. Archive documents, newspaper articles, and testimonies from the period will form the primary sources of this research.

### **1. The Road to the May 27, 1960 Coup: The Political and Social Situation in Turkey During April and May**

As political tensions rapidly escalated in Turkey towards the end of the 1950s, April and May 1960 marked a period when these tensions reached their peak. The Democrat Party was increasingly disturbed by the growing public support for the Republican People's Party. April 1960 stands out as a time when the DP applied intense pressure to suppress CHP's opposition (Akis, 4 May 1960, pp. 5-10). The CHP's rallies in Anatolia were met with great enthusiasm by the public, which in turn made the DP government uneasy. Through governors and district governors, attempts were made to halt these rallies, leading to frequent clashes between DP members and CHP supporters. Even journalists covering CHP rallies were attacked (Akşam, 19 April 1960, p. 1). The DP government sought to suppress the warm reception CHP officials, especially İsmet İnönü, received in Anatolia, and swiftly introduced a series of laws to curb this (Karpas, 1975, p. 204). As part of these efforts, on 18 April 1960, newspapers in Turkey reported that the Investigation Committee established by the DP government had been approved by parliament (Milliyet, 19 April 1960, p. 1). This committee, composed of 15 DP deputies, aimed to investigate and control opposition activities across the country. Shortly after the establishment of the committee, all congresses and party meetings nationwide were banned (Akşam, 19 April 1960, p. 1). Furthermore, reporting on the committee's activities was entirely prohibited (Cumhuriyet, 19-20 April 1960, p. 1). The actions of the Investigation Committee are remembered as one of the most significant steps in the suppression of press freedom in Turkey (Sander, 1998, p. 316).

Towards the end of April, large protests led by university students were held in Ankara and Istanbul against the DP government. These demonstrations saw

serious clashes between the police and students, with the streets filled with protests (Ahmad, 1977, p. 260). Many students were arrested following these events, and police interventions became increasingly harsh. After the events in Ankara on 20 May, CHP deputies left the parliament in protest (Ulus, 18 April 1960, p. 1). During this period, İsmet İnönü described the activities of the Investigation Committee as a “civilian coup” (Ulus, 18 April 1960, p. 1). On 25 April 1960, the Investigation Committee took severe measures aimed at controlling written documents and further suppressing dissent (Cumhuriyet, 26 April 1960, p. 1). A law passed in parliament on 27 April granted the committee extraordinary powers; many of the powers in the Criminal Procedure Law, the Military Penal Code, and the Press Law were transferred to the committee. Public officials and citizens who disobeyed the committee’s orders were subject to imprisonment (Cumhuriyet, 28 April 1960, p. 1). On the same day, martial law was declared in Istanbul and Ankara. Night-time curfews were imposed, entertainment venues were closed, and universities were shut down (Cumhuriyet, 29 April 1960, p. 1). Protests in Istanbul grew larger, leading to serious clashes between students and the police. On 1 May, Adnan Menderes described the events as a “rebellion, not a revolution” (Yeni Sabah, 2 May 1960, p. 1). During this period, pressures on the press intensified, with many newspapers being either shut down or heavily censored (Zürcher, 2004, p. 224).

By mid-May, clashes between DP and CHP supporters during a DP rally in Izmir further escalated tensions (Hürriyet, 26 May 1960, p. 1). At this rally, Adnan Menderes declared that he would not resign and would continue his struggle. The reporting of protests in Ankara and Istanbul was prohibited. On 22 May, all communications in Ankara were censored, and only DP deputies were allowed to speak in parliament (Dünya, 23 May 1960, p. 1; Cumhuriyet, 23 May 1960, p. 1). These harsh interventions by the Investigation Committee became a symbol of the government’s attempt to completely silence the opposition, leading to increased

resistance from CHP members in parliament (Ahmad, 1977, p. 263). On 26 May 1960, Hürriyet newspaper announced that the Investigation Committee had completed its task (Hürriyet, 26 May 1960, p. 1). During this period, the DP government's actions involved harsh measures aimed at silencing both the opposition and the press. Newspapers were forced to shut down, and those that remained could only publish government-approved news. Simultaneously, protests across Turkey were banned, and strict measures were implemented through martial law. Towards the end of May, the pressures on CHP and its leader İsmet İnönü increased, with the government attempting to silence all dissenting voices (Karpas, 1975, p. 210).

## **2. The Practices of the Investigation Committee: Methods and Impact on Press Freedom**

In the late 1950s, the Democrat Party government in Turkey faced increasing political opposition and social unrest. In response, the government established the Investigation Committee in April 1960, granting it extensive powers to suppress dissent and control the press. This committee was authorized to conduct investigations, enforce censorship, and implement punitive measures against individuals and organizations deemed oppositional (Ahmad, 1977).

The committee's practices included the closure of newspapers critical of the government, the arrest of journalists, and the censorship of news content. For example, prominent newspapers such as Ulus and Akis were forcibly shut down, and their editors were subjected to legal harassment (Zürcher, 2004). Journalists, aware of the extensive surveillance mechanisms, frequently resorted to self-censorship to avoid reprisals, significantly limiting the diversity of viewpoints presented in the media (Hale, 2013).

One of the most controversial practices of the committee was the wiretapping of telephone conversations between opposition leaders and journalists. These recordings were used as evidence to justify the arrests of opposition figures



and to silence dissenting voices (Kasapsaraçoğlu, 2020). The pervasive monitoring of communication created a climate of fear, undermining both press freedom and public discourse (Karpas, 1959).

The committee's activities had far-reaching implications for democratic governance in Turkey. By suppressing independent journalism and controlling the flow of information, the DP effectively weakened democratic institutions and eroded public trust in the media (Ahmad, 1977). This period serves as a stark reminder of how unchecked governmental power can jeopardize civil liberties and the democratic process.

### **3. Analysis of Wiretapping and Press-Opposition Relations During the May 27, 1960 Coup**

The activities of the Investigation Committee began on 28 April 1960 and continued until 20 May 1960. During this period, telephone conversations between members of the Republican People's Party, party members, and journalists were wiretapped by the committee. The wiretapping was part of the Democrat Party's strategy to increase its pressure on the opposition. The aim was to control the exchange of information between the opposition and the press, as well as to monitor any potential political activities. These wiretaps not only sought to prevent opposition activities but also posed a serious threat to press freedom. By wiretapping communication channels between the CHP and journalists, the DP sought to weaken the press's ties with the opposition (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960b), (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960c), (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960d).

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### **3.1. Banning of Events and Commemorations**

The prohibition by the Democrat Party government of İsmet İnönü's attempt to lay a wreath at his mother's grave was a key element in its efforts to neutralise the opposition. This ban was not just the prevention of a personal commemoration but can be seen as a broad measure taken against the rising public support for the CHP. From 1959 onwards, the effectiveness of CHP rallies led to increased pressure from the DP on these gatherings. In particular, İnönü's rallies in Anatolia were met with great enthusiasm by the public, which the DP government perceived as a significant threat (Karpat, 1975, p. 205). The DP government resorted to various prohibitions to prevent İnönü from addressing the public and to silence the opposition's voice. Similarly, İnönü's planned rally in Kayseri was also blocked by the local authorities. These pressures were not limited to Kayseri; local officials and security forces intervened against CHP rallies in many cities (Ahmad, 1977, p. 262). Governors and district governors attempted to prevent these rallies from taking place, and in many areas, DP supporters provoked incidents at these rallies (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). DP members attending CHP rallies deliberately instigated fights to disrupt these gatherings (Sander, 1998, p. 320).

These bans and incidents at rallies were discussed in telephone conversations between CHP provincial organisations and journalists, but these communications were also monitored by the Investigation Committee. Particularly, the DP

government closely followed these contacts between the press and the opposition. The DP used wiretapping as a tool to control the press's exchange of information regarding CHP rallies and how these events were reported to the public (Zürcher, 2004, p. 226). Wiretapping was systematically used by the government to monitor how the CHP conveyed the pressures and incidents at rallies to the press and to prevent the press from presenting opposition narratives. While the press attempted to convey the incidents at CHP rallies to the public, this process was tightly controlled by the government through censorship and wiretapping. For example, the ban on İnönü's rally in Kayseri and the reactions to it were frequently discussed in phone calls between the press and the CHP. The DP government monitored these conversations to prevent the events from being reflected in the media and increased pressure on the press to weaken CHP's public support and political power (Ahmad, 1977, p. 263). Wiretapping also covered notifications from CHP's provincial organisations to party headquarters. Particularly, local incidents and bans were relayed to the party centre by telephone, but this exchange of information was also controlled by the committee. The government used wiretaps effectively to prevent these bans and pressures from being reported in the press. Especially the incidents caused by DP supporters at CHP rallies and the attempts to convey these events to the press were among the primary targets of the government's wiretapping efforts (Sander, 1998, p. 321).

### **3.2. Parliamentary Ban and Journalists' Pursuit of Information**

The 12-session ban imposed on the Republican People's Party leader İsmet İnönü from attending parliamentary sessions, in line with the decisions of the Investigation Committee, was part of the Democrat Party's strategy to increase its pressure on the opposition. This ban was among the harsh measures taken to prevent İnönü from engaging in opposition activities within the parliament. Journalists who sought to verify the accuracy of this ban contacted the CHP headquarters by phone

to obtain information. However, these telephone conversations were wiretapped by the Investigation Committee, and the exchange of information between the press and the CHP was constantly monitored by the government (Çavdar, 1992, p. 185). This process greatly limited journalists' efforts to access information and weakened communication between the press and the opposition. The DP took more comprehensive measures to block opposition activities within the parliament. Off-agenda speeches were banned, and since the speaker of the parliament was a DP member, CHP deputies were constantly prevented from speaking. The DP's repressive policies restricted the effectiveness of the opposition in parliament, further deepening the issues journalists faced in accessing accurate information (Mango, 1999, p. 216). Particularly, the speeches of CHP members during parliamentary sessions were frequently interrupted, preventing them from expressing their views.

In response to these pressures, CHP deputies boycotted the parliament and refused to attend sessions. After the student protests in Ankara on 20 May 1960, CHP deputies left the parliament and decided not to participate in the sessions (Heper, 1985, p. 143). Journalists sought to learn about these protests and inform the public by communicating with CHP officials over the phone (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). However, these conversations were also wiretapped, and the flow of information was kept under government control. This was used as a tool to weaken the press's information exchange with the opposition. Journalists' efforts to access information were constantly hindered due to government oversight, making it difficult for opposition views in parliament to reach the public. While the DP silenced opposition voices within the parliament, it successfully mirrored this silence in the press. Journalists' attempts to access information were consistently obstructed during this period of restricted press freedom, and wiretapping became a key element of the government's pressure on the press (Landau, 1984, p. 152). This monitoring and control mechanism became a central aspect of the DP's policy of controlling both the opposition and the press within parliament.

### **3.3. Ban on the Publication of Parliamentary Proceedings**

The prohibition on publishing parliamentary proceedings in newspapers was one of the most severe restrictions imposed on press freedom during this period. Following these bans, journalists sought to learn about what was happening in parliament by contacting CHP deputies over the phone to inform the public. However, these conversations were also wiretapped by the Investigation Committee, and the flow of information through the press was tightly controlled (Karaosmanoğlu, 1967, p. 130). The DP government sought to limit public access to information by preventing the publication of opposition voices in the press, thus ensuring that dissenting opinions were not heard by the public (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). Wiretapping became a tool for the government to control information and limit the press's ability to obtain accurate information. The student protests in April and May 1960, particularly those led by university students, were seen by the DP government as being connected to the speeches made by CHP members in parliament. The DP believed that the publication of CHP statements in the press would increase the opposition's influence on the public, and thus it employed all available means to prevent these views from being disseminated in the media (Dodd, 1969, p. 112). Journalists were in daily contact with CHP deputies to find out what was happening in parliament, but this flow of information was also intercepted by the Investigation Committee. Journalists closely monitored developments in parliament to determine what could and could not be published. However, these efforts were carried out under the intense pressure of the government.

The principles of impartiality and independence in the press were severely undermined by the DP government's increasing control over the media. The government effectively used both censorship and wiretapping to prevent opposition speeches in parliament from being reported in newspapers and to limit the public's

access to information (Mardin, 1971, p. 145). During this period, journalists faced great difficulties in accessing information about events in parliament, as every piece of information that was transmitted to the press was subject to government oversight. While journalists did everything they could to inform the public about parliamentary events, the DP government intensified censorship in its attempts to keep parliamentary proceedings hidden from the public. Constant investigations into what could or could not be published, coupled with the DP's oppressive policies, largely silenced the press (Rustow, 1956, p. 73). These mechanisms of control seriously hampered the press's ability to access information and provide accurate news to the public.

### **3.4. Reporting on Martial Law**

In April and May, student protests intensified in Turkey, especially at universities in Istanbul and Ankara. During this period, universities were temporarily closed, and exams were postponed. Students protested both the political situation in Turkey and Adnan Menderes, as well as NATO's presence in the country. The protests at universities in Istanbul and Ankara were particularly effective due to the large student populations. During this time, martial law was declared in Ankara and Istanbul. The government sought to prevent these events from being reflected on the international stage, particularly at NATO meetings (Kuyucu, 1969, p. 142). Police intervention against the students was much harsher than that of the military (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). Reports of police firing on students and even storming university faculties appeared in the press, although much of this information was censored. Journalists sought details of the incidents by contacting CHP officials, but these conversations were also wiretapped by the Investigation Committee. During this period, the difference in approach between the military and the police was notable; while the military dealt with protesters more cautiously, the police intervened more aggressively. The police's heavy-handed approach during student protests at Istanbul University was reported in the press and

frequently mentioned in phone conversations between the press and the CHP (Lewis, 1970, p. 198; Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). The government monitored these conversations to control the flow of information to the press and prevent the public from receiving accurate news (Harris, 1975, p. 210).

These events cast a shadow over NATO's meeting in Turkey. The protests against NATO and Menderes by students attracted international attention, but the government sought to minimise the reflection of these events abroad. The demonstrations during the NATO meeting were viewed as a crisis that could damage the government's national and international reputation, and therefore censorship of the press was further intensified (Jenkins, 2001, p. 235).

### **3.5. Closure of Newspapers and Restrictions on Press Freedom**

The Democrat Party came to power in the 1950 elections with a promise of press freedom and initially sought to fulfil these promises in its first few years. However, particularly in the second half of the DP's rule, serious restrictions were imposed on press freedom. The last seven years of the DP's decade-long rule were marked by harsh interventions and restrictions on the opposition press. The attacks on journalists at CHP rallies, the impunity of the perpetrators, and the imprisonment of journalists were among the most significant interventions in press freedom during this period (Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 413). The closure of newspapers such as *Ulus*, *Akis*, *İzmir Sabah Postası*, and *Demokrat İzmir* was a concrete example of the DP's repressive policies towards the press. These closure orders were conveyed to journalists by CHP officials over the phone, but this communication was also wiretapped by the Investigation Committee. During this period, journalists attempted to reach CHP officials by phone to obtain information, but this communication was tightly monitored due to the government's pressure (Zürcher, 2004, p. 243).

Arrests of journalists, the closure of newspapers, and the suspension of printing presses all reflected the DP's intention to completely control the press.

Printing houses, fearing that they would be the next targets of the DP's repressive policies, contacted CHP officials to ask, "Will our press also be shut down?" (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). This shows that printing houses and the press were fully under control, and the ability of journalists to report freely was severely restricted (Freely, 1998, p. 187). It became clear that the DP aimed to completely silence the opposition through new laws and additional articles targeting the press. Amendments to the press law legalised censorship, even prohibiting any mention of the bans and censorship in the press. Censorship during this period reached new dimensions, inflicting significant damage on the independence of the press (Ahmad, 1993, p. 284). The DP's promise of press freedom was thoroughly undermined as the government intensified its pressure on the media to maintain its grip on power.

### **3.6. The Effects of Adnan Menderes' Speeches**

Throughout 1960, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes consistently linked student demonstrations and public protests to the Republican People's Party, claiming that CHP had "hidden ambitions" behind these events. Menderes argued that İsmet İnönü, in particular, was inciting the public, and he claimed that the CHP's plans were at the root of the student movements. These statements were seen as an attempt by Menderes to justify the harsh interventions by the police and to manipulate public opinion (Ergüder, 1979, p. 215). Menderes also blamed the CHP for the country's socioeconomic problems, claiming that the opposition's disruptive activities were responsible for the economic stagnation and social unrest. His speeches were a clear indicator of how the government was attempting to manipulate both the press and the public. Journalists, particularly those from foreign media outlets, tried to relay the information they received to CHP leaders, but these communications were intercepted through wiretapping (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). British and French newspapers reported that Menderes would not be able to maintain power, even with US aid, and predicted that



the DP would lose the next election (Birand, 1984, p. 178). However, the publication of such news in Turkey was prevented under a strict censorship regime.

Additionally, the intensification of censorship in Turkey severely limited how journalists could access information. Journalists and CHP officials tried to follow Turkish news through Cypriot newspapers, which were not subject to censorship. Since the newspapers in Cyprus were unaffected by the censorship in Turkey, much of the information that was suppressed in the Turkish press found a place in the Cypriot media, and opposition figures in Turkey sought information through these channels (Bora, 2002, p. 65). This situation highlights how difficult the period was for the press in Turkey and how tightly the government controlled the flow of information to the public. Menderes' hard stance against student protests and his accusations that the CHP was behind these events further restricted the press's ability to voice dissenting opinions. Menderes called on the public to support the police against the protesters, which was seen as an attempt to legitimise police interventions. As journalists attempted to report these developments to the public, it became clear that such information was being closely monitored through wiretapping by the government (Giritlioğlu, 1997, p. 112). Thus, the government applied a systematic strategy to both control the press and silence opposition voices.

### **3.7. Rumours of İnönü's Arrest**

Rumours that İsmet İnönü had been attacked and arrested in parliament quickly spread due to the censorship policies of the time. These rumours caused great concern, particularly among the public and those close to the opposition. Although there had been no assault or arrest attempt on İnönü in parliament, journalists contacted the CHP headquarters by phone to verify the accuracy of the reports, but these calls were also monitored by the Investigation Committee. By keeping these fact-checking processes under control, the government made it difficult for the press to access accurate information (Kırlı, 2002, p. 89). The strict surveillance and

censorship imposed by the government during this period exacerbated the difficulty in verifying reports of an attack or arrest on İnönü. These rumours were not confined to incidents in parliament, as baseless claims that İnönü was a draft dodger also surfaced. The purpose behind these rumours was to discredit the CHP leader and humiliate him in the eyes of the public. Despite İnönü's service as a high-ranking officer during both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish War of Independence, government-affiliated circles sought to discredit him with unfounded allegations of draft dodging (Gözübüyük, 1967, p. 157). The primary aim of these rumours was to dishonour İnönü and the CHP, diminishing their standing in the public eye. Despite his status as a national hero, the government sought to weaken İnönü's political influence by perpetuating such rumours.

Journalists were in constant contact with CHP officials to verify whether these rumours were true, but these communications were also under strict government surveillance. Wiretapping during this period demonstrated the extent of the government's pressure on the press (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archive, 1960a). The government not only obstructed the flow of accurate information to the public but also facilitated the spread of discrediting campaigns targeting İnönü and the CHP through the press (Şimşir, 1991, p. 203). This period is remembered as one in which both the press and the opposition faced severe restrictions on accessing and disseminating accurate information. Wiretapping revealed the systematic nature of the government's efforts to manipulate the flow of information and suppress dissenting voices. Even a national hero like İnönü was subjected to such discrediting tactics, illustrating how the DP government used every tool at its disposal to undermine the opposition.

#### **4. The Investigation Committee on the Road to Authoritarianism: The Democrat Party's Evolution Towards One-Party Rule and Wiretapping**

Following the 1957 elections, the Democrat Party made intense efforts to suppress the opposition in every way possible. This process began with the

confiscation of the Republican People's Party's assets and continued with anti-democratic practices, such as cutting off economic investments in opposition regions. The DP prioritised investment in areas where it had received votes while neglecting others; some provinces were even downgraded to district status. These actions were seen as part of the DP's attempts to silence the opposition and maintain its grip on power (Turkish Grand National Assembly Records, 1960, pp. 189-190). After the 6-7 September events, the DP's policies to suppress the opposition became increasingly focused on the press. The press law was amended multiple times to work against journalists, and many newspapers were shut down, with numerous journalists imprisoned under the "Law on Crimes Committed Through Publications, Radio, or Public Gatherings," which was enacted before the 1954 elections (Milliyet, 8 April 1960). During this period, pressure on media outlets that were not pro-government reached severe levels, and journalists had to work under heavy censorship and intimidation. The DP aimed to eliminate the independence of the press and bring it under government control.

After the 1957 elections, the DP sought to prevent the CHP from engaging in any form of propaganda as a way of halting its decline in votes and rendering the opposition ineffective. Particularly from 1959 onwards, CHP rallies were either sabotaged by DP supporters or banned by governors (Akşam, 19 April 1960). Between 1959 and 1960, almost every CHP rally encountered violent incidents, with journalists covering the events being assaulted, and even CHP members of parliament, including National Struggle hero İsmet İnönü, facing physical attacks (Cumhuriyet, 26 April 1960). The attack during İnönü's rally in Kayseri revealed the extent to which political violence had escalated in the country. The DP's efforts to silence the opposition intensified in 1960, and in the lead-up to the May 27, 1960 military coup, the DP government increased its pressure on the opposition without restraint. During this period, the Investigation Committee was formed, operating as

an extralegal entity far removed from democratic principles. Established by a parliamentary decision on 18 April 1960, this committee consisted of DP deputies and was tasked with confiscating newspapers, arresting journalists, and blocking all activities of opposition parties such as the CHP (Milliyet, 19 April 1960; Turkish Grand National Assembly Records, 1960, p. 213). The Investigation Committee was granted prosecutorial and judicial powers. Moreover, public officials who neglected to enforce the committee's decisions could be sentenced to prison for six months to three years, and appeals against the committee's rulings were prohibited (Cumhuriyet, 28 April 1960). The committee's powers included:

- The committee members were granted the powers of prosecutors, judges, and military judges.
- The committee was authorised to confiscate and shut down newspapers.
- It had the authority to seize any documents or items.
- Those who opposed the committee's measures were to be sentenced to one to three years in prison.
- Public officials who failed to carry out the committee's rulings were to be sentenced to six months to three years in prison.
- Those who disclosed information about the investigations could be sentenced to six months to one year in prison.
- Those who gave false testimony or committed perjury were to receive double the penalties outlined in the Penal Code.
- Appeals against the committee's decisions were not permitted.
- The committee's investigations would be considered preliminary examinations.

Armed with such broad powers, the Investigation Committee exerted immense pressure not only on the opposition but also on the press. The phones of both opposition and non-opposition journalists were wiretapped, newspaper offices were raided, and journalists were arrested. These wiretaps were extended to cover

all general and private communication channels, and the conversations were recorded. Wiretapping became one of the most significant tools of repression during that period, and press freedom in Turkey was effectively abolished (Milliyet, 5 May 1960). Journalists were rendered unable to fulfil their duties, and a strict control mechanism was established over the press. Even postal mail, letters, and telegrams across the country were monitored, with even basic means of communication subjected to censorship. By 1960, democratic rights in Turkey had been completely eroded, and political pressures had become uncontrollable (Cumhuriyet, 8 May 1960; BCA, 1959). During this time, both the opposition and the press were silenced, and the functioning of the multi-party system had all but come to a halt.

One of the DP government's strategies to suppress the opposition was to place the CHP and other opposition groups under surveillance through illegal wiretaps. These wiretaps, which began particularly before the 1957 elections, were used to monitor every activity of the opposition. During the trials on the Island of Democracy and Freedom (formerly known as Yassıada) after the 1960 coup, it was revealed that the DP government had conducted illegal wiretaps on the CHP and the opposition. The telephone recordings presented during the Yassıada Trials demonstrated the extent of the government's control over the opposition. These wiretaps covered not only political conversations but also private ones, with the communications of not just CHP leaders but also many opposition journalists being monitored (Cumhuriyet, 23 May 1960). These illegal wiretaps further illustrated the scale of the repression on both the press and political opposition. The recordings presented during the Yassıada Trials showed that the DP government closely monitored not only the CHP but also the opposition press, controlling all communication channels.

## **Conclusion**

After the 1957 elections, the Democrat Party government in Turkey intensified its repressive policies to silence the opposition, marking the beginning of a dark period in the country's democratic history. In its effort to suppress dissent, the DP targeted not only the press but also the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, and other segments of society. As a result, press freedom, freedom of expression, and political participation were severely restricted. During this period, the DP, which had initially come to power in the early 1950s with promises to protect press freedom and democratic values, gradually weakened democracy in its final years. In 1959 and 1960, pressure on CHP rallies and the press intensified, with rallies being blocked, and journalists facing attacks. The DP's policies to suppress the opposition were not limited to physical assaults but also included the enactment of laws aimed at undermining the independence of the press. The establishment of the Investigation Committee institutionalised these pressures, with even telephone conversations between journalists and the opposition being monitored. The events of 1960 revealed the extent to which press freedom in Turkey was under threat, as the flow of information between the press and the opposition was tightly controlled by the government, further stifling dissenting voices.

During this period, the DP's illegal practices were also exposed during the Yassıada trials, where it was revealed that the DP had been conducting unlawful wiretapping of the CHP and the press. These wiretaps covered not only political discussions but also private conversations, completely obstructing the press's ability to report independently. By resorting to illegal methods to suppress the opposition, the DP undermined democracy and restricted the public's right to access accurate information. This period remains one of the darkest in Turkey's political history. The repressive policies pursued by the DP in its final years led to significant social and political turmoil, ultimately culminating in the May 27, 1960, military coup. This coup interrupted Turkey's democratic order and brought an end to the DP's rule. The DP's repressive policies highlighted the extent of the threats to press freedom and

the opposition and demonstrated once again the crucial role of a free press in the healthy functioning of democracy.

The Democrat Party's pressures on the opposition and its use of illegal wiretapping marked a significant deterioration of democratic norms in Turkey during the late 1950s. These practices revealed how political power can be used to undermine communication privacy, a cornerstone of press freedom and a vital component of democratic governance. By systematically monitoring and suppressing opposition voices, the DP not only stifled dissent but also eroded public trust in both the press and the broader democratic process.

The use of wiretapping as a political tool extended beyond controlling opposition activities; it fundamentally altered the relationship between the press and the government. Journalists, under the constant threat of surveillance, were unable to perform their duties as independent arbiters of truth. This period saw a drastic decline in press independence, with media outlets either aligning with the government or facing financial and legal repercussions.

The DP's actions during this period underscore the fragility of democratic institutions in the face of authoritarian tendencies. The erosion of press freedom, combined with invasive surveillance measures, weakened the public's access to accurate information and disrupted the balance of power essential to a functioning democracy. These events serve as a stark reminder of the dangers posed by unchecked governmental authority and the critical importance of safeguarding press independence and communication privacy. While international comparisons, such as the Watergate scandal in the United States, highlight parallels in the misuse of surveillance for political gain, the context and implications of such actions in Turkey remain unique. The DP's use of wiretapping must be understood within the broader historical and political framework of mid-20th century Turkey, where democratic institutions were still in a fragile state of development. This distinction is crucial to

appreciating the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by Turkey's press and opposition during this period. In conclusion, the DP's reliance on wiretapping and other extralegal measures to suppress dissent left a lasting impact on Turkey's political and media landscape. These practices not only disrupted the democratic process in the short term but also set a precedent for future governments to exploit similar tools for political control. Protecting communication privacy and ensuring press independence remain vital for the continued development of democratic governance in Turkey.

In conclusion, the lead-up to the May 27, 1960 coup was a period in which democracy in Turkey was seriously weakened, press freedom was abolished, and political pressures increased. This period highlighted the fragility of democracy and press freedom in Turkey and underscored the importance of protecting fundamental democratic rights, such as communication privacy, for the sustainability of democracy.

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