

## The People's Houses as a Model of Non-Formal Education in Turkey (1932-1951)

Behçet Kemal YEŞİLBURSA\*

### Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to give a factual history of the establishment of the Houses. The People's Houses (Halkevleri) were founded in 1932 as cultural and political centres with the aim of educating the people in accordance with the nationalist, secularist and populist ideas of the new Republic. Their specific aim was to establish and reinforce a national culture based on Turkish folklore, teach the Republican principles, raise literacy rates and improve the living standards of the people. After nearly two decades of functioning, the People's Houses were closed in 1951 by the Democrat Party. Although the People's Houses were organised and conducted by the Republican People's Party, the only political party in modern Turkey until 1946, they did not represent such a complete innovation in Turkish life as was often assumed. After the Young Turk revolution in 1908, thirteen social centres, called "Türk Ocağı" or "Turkish Hearth", were established in various parts of the country to educate the common people in Turkish culture. Not all of these centres were successful, according to any standard; and they fell far short of the standard later set by the People's Party. But those which survived the First World War were taken over by the People's Party in 1923 and, after a complete reorganisation, renamed People's Houses in 1932. Since they were organs of a political party, the People's Houses were primarily centres of political propaganda. However, it must be remembered that the propaganda of the People's Party was much wider in scope than that of a political party operating in a country with is a tradition of party conflict. Namely, the politics of the People's Party were essentially national politics; its propaganda, rather than being directed to the criticism and ousting of other parties, aimed exclusively at national consolidation. In spite of the greatest temptations, the new Turkish Republic refused to abandon this enlightened view of propaganda, as testified by the multifarious activities of the People's Houses. The Halkevleri played an enormous role in the life of the new Turkish republic. If not in their origin, then in their activities, and even more so in their achievements, they were unique and exemplary institutions, without which even so great a leader as Atatürk might have been unable to carry out the far-reaching changes that he did.*

**Key words:** *People's Houses, People's Halls, Turkish Hearths, Halkevleri, Türk Ocakları*

\* Prof. Dr., Uludağ University, Turkey, behcetyesilbursa@yahoo.com

## Türkiye’de İnfomal Eğitim Modeli Olarak Halkevleri (1932-1951)

### Özet

*Bu makalenin amacı, Halkevlerinin kuruluşu ve tarihi gelişimi hakkında bilgi vermekten ziyade, bu kurumların iç ve dış kamuoyunda (özellikle İngiltere’de) nasıl algılandığıdır. Halkevleri 1912 yılında kurulan ancak zaman içinde işlevini yitiren Türk Ocakları yerine 1932 yılında Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi tarafından kurulmuş ve yönetilmiştir. Türk Ocaklarının aydın merkezli faaliyetlerinin aksine halkevleri tamamen halkın içinde halk merkezli bir faaliyet yürütmüştür. Halkevleri, Cumhuriyetin önemli kurumlarından biridir. Cumhuriyetin, Cumhuriyet ideolojisinin ve özellikle 1930’lu yılların ekonomik ve sosyal koşullarının bir ürünüdür. Halkevleri, dünyada benzerleri olmakla birlikte Türkiye’ye özgü bir kültür kurumudur. Türk kültür hayatında önemli bir görev üstlenen Halkevleri, bu görevini başarıyla yerine getirmiştir. Kültürel ve siyasi birer merkez olan Halkevlerinin amacı halkı Cumhuriyetin halkçı, milliyetçi ve laik ilkeleri çerçevesinde eğitmek, özellikle Cumhuriyet ilkeleri çerçevesinde milli bir kültür inşa etmek olmuştur. Halkevleri bir kültür merkezi olmakla birlikte Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi tarafından bir propaganda merkezi olarak da kullanılmıştır. Bu sebeple Halkevleri 1951 yılında Demokrat Parti tarafından kapatılmıştır. Oysa Halkevleri tamamen kapatılmak yerine bir kültür kurumu olarak zamana göre yeniden düzenlenebilirdi. Ancak siyasi bir takım hesaplar Cumhuriyetin önemli bir kültür kurumu olan Halkevlerini tamamen ortadan kaldırmış, bu sebeple Halkevlerinin açılması ile birlikte hızlanan kültürel kalkınma da önemli ölçüde kan kaybetmiştir. Bugün toplumsal gelişmeyi sağlamak için birçok sivil toplum örgütünün varlığı düşünüldüğünde Halkevlerinin ne kadar önemli kurumlar olduğu ve faaliyetler yaptığı kendiliğinden ortaya çıkmaktadır. Halkevleri 1960 ihtilalinden sonra Türk Kültür Dernekleri olarak tekrar açılmıştır. 1963 yılında ise bu isim tekrar Halkevi olarak değiştirilmiştir. Ancak hiçbir zaman o eski yapısına ve gücüne kavuşamamıştır. Daha sonra da bir kültür kurumundan ziyade marjinal, ideolojik ve siyasi bir sivil toplum kuruluşu haline dönüşmüştür.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Halkevleri, Halkodaları, Türk Ocakları, People’s Houses, Turkish Hearths

## 1. History

The People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) were established in 1932 with the cultural and political aims of educating the people according to the nationalist, secularist and populist ideas of the new Republic. Specifically, they aimed to establish and reinforce a national culture based on Turkish folklore, teach the Republican principles, raise literacy rates and improve the living standards of the people.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural aim, namely, the establishment of a national culture based on folklore and on an authentic Turkish life style, required extensive sociological and folkloristic research to be carried out in the villages, including the tribal groups where the ethnic Turkish culture had been preserved unspoiled. The political aim was to persuade as many people as possible in rural areas that (their new ideology) Turkish nationalism was and Republicanism their modern political identity. The survival of Turkey as a nation depended on the mass acceptance of these political principles which came to be equal with modernisation itself.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, it was clear that to fulfil these goals, the *Halkevleri* needed to develop first the media to enable them to reach and indoctrinate the largest number of people possible; and second, to devise a methodology for collecting the folkloristic data necessary to build a national culture; and finally, to refine that data and make it acceptable to a more sophisticated audience. As a result, from the outset the *Halkevleri* were faced with the need to develop a system of communication capable of serving their goals.<sup>3</sup>

The three major media of communication or informal education, in addition to the educational sources developed by the *Halkevleri* consisted of the publication of reviews and books, the establishment of libraries, and the giving talks to towns and city audiences. The *Halkevleri* published a large number of reviews. Each House in the provincial capital was allowed to publish its own review which acted as the "spokesman" for all other Houses in that province. They were financed with funds from the national budget allocated to the *Halkevleri* in each province.

The chief review was the *Ülkü* (Ideal) published by the *Ankara Halkevi* beginning in 1932/33. It defined the general policy of the Houses according to the prevailing views of the ruling Republican Party. In practice, however, the policy of the *Ülkü* and its approach to problems varied with its editor's views and background accordingly. Approximately fifty-four reviews were published by the *Halkevleri* in 1933-1950. Only fifteen reviews

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1 Kemal Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses on the Development of Communication in Turkey: 1931-1951", *Die Welt des Islam*, New Series, Volume: 15, Issue: 1/4 (1974), pp. 69-84. İbrahim Erdal, *Halkevlerinin Kuruluşu, Yapısı ve Yozgat Halkevi, 1932-1951*, Siyasal Kitabevi, Ankara 2013, pp. 42-46.

2 Kemal Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses. . .", pp. 69-84. Ayrıca bkz. Anıl Çeçen, *Atatürk'ün Kültür Kurumu, Halkevleri*, Cumhuriyet Kitapları, Ankara 2000.

3 Kemal Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses. . .", pp. 69-84. Ayrıca bkz. Sefa Şimşek, *Halkevleri 1932-1951*, İstanbul 2002.

followed a regular publication schedule. Although there are no available statistics to show the total circulation of the *Halkevleri* reviews, it is certain that most of them did not publish more than a few thousand copies. The quality of the print and the content of the reviews was not high quality. However, despite their irregular quality, these reviews published a significant quantity of original material in the field of anthropology, folklore, sociology, literature and education, and provided useful information on various social groups, and on village and town life.<sup>4</sup>

The second media communication was the publication of books and pamphlets, which printed findings of research on linguistics, folklore and history. The third media was public lectures on a variety of subjects delivered by intellectuals such as university teachers, professionals, and writers. Reviews, books and libraries, however, broke new ground, and stimulated intellectual activity under freedom and democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The forerunners of the *Halkevleri* were the *Türk Ocakları* (*Turkish Hearths*), established in 1912 to formulate and disseminate nationalism. The *Ocaks* were an ideological guide to the Union and Progress Party and gradually expanded, opening branches in the large cities. Later, after the foundation of the Republic, the *Ocaks* continued to receive government support while keeping a private organisation status. By 1930 there were 255 *Ocaks* in the country, carrying out activities in the fields of health, rural improvement, social assistance, drama, music, culture, economic development and sports. Their aim was to awaken cultural consciousness and a feeling of cultural unity among all Turks, including those living in foreign countries. The *Ocaks* viewed the state and the nation as two different entities, the first political, the second cultural. During the occupation, especially in 1920, the *Ocaks* in İstanbul were closed, both because of their closeness to the Union and Progress Party and pressure from the conservative and religious factions. The *Ocaks* resumed activity after 1923, but less zealously. With the emergence of a Turkish national state, their main objective was attained, and many of their political and cultural ideas were absorbed in the philosophy of the new regime.<sup>6</sup>

Pan-Turanism had been one of the dynamic ideas underpinning the *Ocaks'* foundation, but the Republic's foreign policy was based on the rejection of all expansionist dreams. Anatolia was to become the cradle of the new Turkish nationalism. The events between 1919 and 1923 provided new ideals and a new philosophy, which the *Ocaks* were not able to comprehend and develop. On the other hand, it would not be feasible for the state, which had become more powerful after 1925, to share its power with an

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4 Kemal Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses...", pp. 69-84. Ayrıca bkz. Arıkan, Zeki, "Halkevlerinin Kuruluşu ve Tarihsel İşlevi", Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi, Cilt: 6, Sayı: 23, s. 261-281.

5 Kemal Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses...", pp. 69-84.

6 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey: Establishment and Growth", Middle East Journal, Volume: 17, Number: ½ (Winter-Spring, 1963), pp. 55-67. Erdal, Op. Cit., pp. 23-35. Kenan Olgun, Yöresel Kalkınmada Adapazarı Halkevi, Değişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, pp. 19-23.

autonomous semi-private organisation whose cultural aims conflicted with the broader aims of the new regime. By 1930, the *Ocaks* seemed to have lost touch with the spirit of the times in the Republic. Finally, the *Türk Ocakları* was unanimously dissolved on 10 April 1931. The Republican Party Convention of May 1931, approved the dissolution of the *Ocaks*, transferred their property to the People's Republican Party, and decided to establish the *Halkevleri*. The *Halkevleri* were officially opened to the public on 19 February 1932, with fourteen active branches.<sup>7</sup>

The *Halkevleri* must be envisaged as instruments of the new broad development policy envisaged by Atatürk after 1930. The *Halkevleri* were placed under the Republican Party's Secretary General. Meanwhile by 1931 the Party had established itself firmly in power as a one-party system, and all its activities were directed from the top through the Secretary General. The *Ankara Halkevi*, the central organisation, was under the direct authority of the Secretary General. The heads of the Houses were appointed by the Republican Party provincial chairmen, not elected by Houses members. The buildings of the Houses were provided via the Republican Party, which also acquired the property donated to the Houses. The funds for the Houses were provided through the Republican Party budget, which in turn acquired them from the state budget. Between 1932 and 1950, 27,366,750 liras were allocated to the Houses from the state budget, about a fifth of which remained in the party treasury. Thus, the Republican Party had effectively established its control over the Houses, leaving them the freedom of undertaking only those activities described in the by-laws.<sup>8</sup>

A People's House contained nine sections: 1. Language and Literature, 2. Fine Arts, 3. Drama, 4. Sports, 5. Social Assistance, 6. Classes and Courses, 7. Library and Publications, 8. Village Development, and 9. History and Museums. In turn, each activity section was divided into sub-branches depending on the membership and available leadership.

The People's Houses' network expanded steadily. By the end of 1932, thirty-four Houses were opened, mainly in provincial capitals. The number increased every year and finally in 1950 reached 478, while the initial target was 500. The villages, as usual, were neglected, although a vast "know-your-village" program had been initiated.<sup>9</sup>

7 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Later, in 1951, this question of property caused the main attack on the Republican Party and ended in the closure of the Houses. The People's Houses' property in real estate was estimated to be worth about 200 million liras in 1951. Erdal, Op. Cit., pp. 35-42. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 23-38.

8 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Erdal, Op. Cit., pp. 46-62. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 39-56. Ayrıca bkz. Gökhan Durak, "Atatürk'ün Halkçılık Anlayışı ve Halkevleri", Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, Yıl: 2, Sayı: 8 (Aralık 2014), s. 420-435.

9 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 39-56.

On Atatürk's death on 10 November 1938, İsmet İnönü became President. As Prime Minister, he had already shown great concern for the Houses, since he saw them as educational instruments rather than exclusively as a means of political indoctrination. As a result, reorganizing and then expanding the House activities into every cultural field was recommended by İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu. After extensive field investigations, he criticized many of the unrealistic policies of the past and recommended that the Houses be used chiefly for mass educational purposes. The result was the redrafting of the Houses' by-laws in 1940 to expand and regulate their activities. From 1940 to 1951, the Houses' activities acquired increasing momentum by adopting a more liberal educational approach. The second idea emerging from these developments was to expand the People's Houses movement into villages by means of smaller organisations called People's Halls (*Halkodalari*) more suitable to rural conditions. In September 1939, the Republican Party Council approved the establishment of the Halls.<sup>10</sup>

The People's Halls were, actually, the extension of the Houses into rural areas, supported directly by the Republican Party, which provided the building plans and even the materials. The Halls were established in rapid succession: 141 in 1940, 2,338 in 1945 and a total of 4,322 in 1950. The initial goal was, however, 10,000, unable to be reached because this entire idea came under attack after the emergence of opposition parties in 1945/46. The Halls were classified as small, medium and large, the minimum requirement being meeting, reading and working rooms. The Halls were guided by modernist-secularist, nationalist principles, similar to the Houses, but they carried out activities connected chiefly with political and cultural modernization. Yet, the People's Halls can be envisaged as part of the populist movement and as fulfilling the same goals as the Houses.<sup>11</sup>

The membership in the Houses and Halls was open to all male and female citizens, including minorities. All citizens, regardless of whether or not they were members of the Republican Party, could participate in the House activities and use its facilities. In order to increase the feeling of belonging, people were encouraged to use the Houses for weddings, circumcisions and other activities. There was a definite lack of popular interest in the Houses at the beginning, not only on the part of the population but among the intellectuals as well. Consequently, in 1938, Şükrü Kaya, the Minister of the Interior and Secretary General of the Party, strongly urged teachers and intellectuals to take over responsibilities in the Houses. Public indifference might have resulted from a variety of reasons: the Houses were a new experiment in Turkish society, so the conservatives depicted them as tools for the destruction of the traditional way of life and encouraged passive resistance. Resistance decreased slowly, particularly after the Houses' reorganisation and partial liberalisation in 1940, as the public gradually became

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10 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Erdal, Op. Cit., pp. 32-46.

11 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 44-46.

used to them and appreciated their activities.<sup>12</sup>

In 1950, with the ascendancy of the Democrat Party to power, the Republicans proposed an agreement to adjust the Houses to the requirements of the multi-party life and preserve them as Atatürk's heritage. But this proposal was rejected by the Democrat Party and subsequently in 1951 all their property was confiscated and this put an end to the Houses' life. The People's Houses' property in real estate was estimated to be worth about 200 million liras in 1951. This question of property caused the main attack on the Republican Party. It is interesting to note that the main criticism directed at the Houses was their identification with the ruling party and the government, and the fact that they never became part of the people as originally intended.<sup>13</sup>

The Republican Party openly promised to reactivate them once in power. After the military coup of 27 May 1960, the military government re-established them under the name of *Türk Kültür Dernekleri* (Turkish Cultural Associations). At an extraordinary meeting, held on 21 April 1963, the Turkish Cultural Associations' name was changed to *Halkevi* (People's House), and the existing 84 branches of Turkish Cultural Associations changed their name to *Halkevi*. This new organisation was declared to be a continuation of the old People's Houses.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The aim of the *Halkevlere*

Since they were organs of a political party, the People's Houses were primarily centres of political propaganda. However, it must be remembered that the propaganda of the People's Party was much wider in scope than that of a political party operating in a country with is a tradition of party conflict. Namely, the politics of the People's Party were essentially national politics; its propaganda, rather than being directed to the criticism and ousting of other parties, aimed exclusively at national consolidation. In spite of the greatest temptations, the new Turkish Republic refused to abandon this enlightened view of propaganda, as testified by the multifarious activities of the *Halkevlere*.<sup>15</sup>

The report issued in 1940 by the *Ankara Halkevi*, the largest and most representative institution at that time, did not attempt to conceal the political aims of the *Halkevlere*: "The People's Club, as an ideal and as an institution" is a very important centre for teaching to the larger part of our population the principles of our political

12 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Erdal, Op. Cit., pp. 42-46, 84-87.

13 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 82-93.

14 Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey...", pp. 55-67. Ayrıca bkz. Selçuk Duman, *Modern Türkiye'nin İnşasında Halkevlere ve Sivas Halkevi Örneği*, Berikan Yayınları, Ankara 2013.

15 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevlere" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Yavuz Özdemir, ve Elif Aktaş, "Halkevlere, 1932'den 1951'e", A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi (TAED), 45, (Erzurum 2011), s. 235-262.

party”; the primary aim, it continued, “is to train and foster patriotism”. The Party tried to achieve this aim not by direct instruction in political matters, but by the indirect and more effective method of cultural propaganda. Its interpretation of the term of “culture” was no less wide than its interpretation of the meaning of “propaganda”. Namely, just as propaganda transcended the merely political, so culture transcended the merely academic.<sup>16</sup>

The second feature of the *Halkevi* was its essentially democratic character. As a club, it claimed to cater neither for the well-to-do nor for the indigent, but for all, despite their economic or social status. Perhaps, naturally, those who attended the more cultural entertainments, the plays, the dances, the recitations, tended to be those who could best appreciate them. However, the variety of the club’s activities was such that no-one, whatever his/her education, would have felt ignored. The removal of social distinctions was something which the *Halkevleri* endeavoured to undertake both in and outside their own precincts, mainly by providing aid to poor but deserving students at schools and universities.<sup>17</sup>

The People’s Party repeatedly emphasised the fact that, since the *Halkevleri* were intended for the good of all, all were equally responsible for their success or failure. As institutions, therefore, they were to be distinguished from those run by a few philanthropists for the benefit of the “common people”. Meanwhile, it became apparent that, in a regime which had still far to go in the way of social transformation, and in which the transformation envisaged was so enormous, some persons were better qualified than others to give a lead to the nation, and these persons, mainly the intellectuals, were to bear a correspondingly greater share of responsibility. This fact was later admitted in the 1940 Report, which, with slight, but pardonable, inconsistency, emphasised: “It is the intellectuals who will give life and progress to happy and great Turkey”.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Number of Visitors

The 1940 Report contained some interesting figures which showed that during the previous year the *Ankara Halkevi* had lived up to its reputation as a House of the People. For example, the number of visitors throughout 1940 was claimed to be as many as 63,501, slightly more than half the total population of Ankara. Figures for the whole of Turkey were not given; but the attendance at those *Halkevleri* which were situated in rural areas was unlikely to have been less than that of the figure claimed for Ankara, where the population had alternative centres of rendezvous and diversion (though less than

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16 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

17 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

18 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

Istanbul). There was, however, a small but interesting discrepancy in the report between the total number of visitors in that one year and the figures given both for attendances at entertainments and for visits to the library. The first figure, as already quoted, was 63,501; the second 79,550; and the third, 64,528. It seems that a “visit” to the People’s House is not distinguished from an attendance at some entertainment or entrance to the library.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Activities

The various activities of the *Halkevleri* were divided roughly into four groups: (1) Language and Literature, (2) Sport, (3) Social Services, (4) Education.

##### 4.1. Language and Literature

The primary aim of the Language and Literature Branch was defined as being the popularisation and creation of “pure and beautiful” Turkish art and literature.<sup>20</sup>

a) In the first place, every effort was made to keep alive the “folk traditions” of the country by means of Folk Art Nights, at which recitations, dances and entertainments, both traditional and new, were given by Folk Poets from every part of Turkey.<sup>21</sup>

b) The Language and Literature branch was also largely responsible for preparing and executing the programmes of important national ceremonies. These programmes were usually built up of films, orations and plays. To entertain and at the same time instruct the children and illiterate, the traditional “*Karagöz*” and other Marionette shows were partly recast and modernised. The anniversaries of famous men were likewise celebrated in or immediately outside the *Halkevleri*.<sup>22</sup>

c) “A recent but potent aim” was the definition given to the term propaganda in the 1940 report. Two lectures delivered on this subject in 1940 at the *Ankara Halkevi* were published in the newspaper “*Ulus*” and in pamphlet form for circulation throughout the country.<sup>23</sup>

d) Lectures by distinguished Turks and foreigners were delivered frequently to

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19 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

20 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Tefvik Çavdar, “Halkevleri”, Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi, Cilt: IV, s. 878-884.

21 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Çavdar, Passim.

22 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Olgun, Op. Cit., pp. 56-82.

23 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Çavdar, Passim.

large audiences. For example, among the lecturers in 1940 were André Siegfried and Lord Dunsany. There were also regular lectures on the meaning and achievements of the Turkish revolution.<sup>24</sup>

e) Exhibitions of paintings and cartoons were frequently organised; and in order to inculcate the notion that art was something which needed constant cultivation, not by a few geniuses but by also a large number of competent craftsmen, classes in both drawing and painting, were held in a special painting hall. For example, one exhibition consisted of 122 works, including six sculptures, and the second of 710 paintings from 26 People's Houses and 165 photographs from 31 *Halkevi*. Artists, both amateur and professional, were invited not merely to submit their work regularly for exhibition, but to undertake tours to different parts of the country. These tours, which were both propagandist and recreational, were financed by the People's Party.<sup>25</sup>

The 1940 Report made no extravagant claims regarding the artistic merits of the works exhibited in the *Halkevi* exhibitions. There was a "refreshing modesty", about the speech delivered at the opening of the First Amateur Photographic Exhibition at Ankara by the Party's Secretary-General. "Taken one by one", he said, "these do not claim a great artistic value". He went on to point out, however, that the aim of the exhibition was above all to "inoculate the enthusiasm for fine arts into the spirit of all our compatriots". Hence, the value of regular exhibitions and even more regular instruction classes. That art was largely the product of hard work and experimentation, rather than of irregular spasms of "inspiration", was the "healthy note" struck in both this speech and the Report.<sup>26</sup>

f) Music had received less attention than painting, but increasing interest was being taken in it. The *Ankara Halkevi* housed a trained choir, which performed new compositions. Remarkable interest was also displayed in western music, and lectures were planned to be arranged on this subject. The performance of short musical plays, written by members of the *Halkevleri*, also met with success.<sup>27</sup>

g) The revival and encouragement of National Folk Dances received a special place in the work of the Language and Literature group.<sup>28</sup>

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24 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Çavdar, Passim.

25 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

26 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

27 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Adem Kara, Halkevleri, 1932-1951, 24 Saat Yayıncılık, Ankara 2006. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

28 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Müslime Güneş, "Adnan Menderes ve Halkevleri", Çağdaş Türkiye Araştırmaları Dergisi, XII/25 (2012-Güz), s. 141-155.

**h)** The theatre (including opera) was given greatest attention since the foundation of the *Halkevi* at Ankara. No less than 86 theatrical performances were organised at the latter *Halkevi* alone. In 1939, for example, with the aid of the State Conservatoire, a performance of “*Madam Butterfly*” was given. This was followed by a successful visit of the “*Comédie Française*”. “We must never be satisfied,” the report insists, “until we have reached the level of these artists”. The number of dramatic performances given in 1940 was 120. Of these, 79 were plays, 11 marionette shows, 12 *Karagöz* shows, and 12 films. The *Ankara Halkevi* even began to make its own share films, mostly propagandist in character.<sup>29</sup>

## 4.2. Sport

The *Halkevleri* wished to inculcate, among other things, the “real sporting spirit”. All forms of sport were encouraged, above all skiing, walking and running. Exhibitions, competitions and outings were regularly arranged.<sup>30</sup>

## 4.3. Social Services

Social Services ranked foremost after the Language and Literature Branch. Much practical assistance was given to poor or otherwise needy people. As the 1941 Report remarks: “the People’s Party is taking nothing from the people, but trying to satisfy their moral and material needs”. This policy was later contrasted with that of the *old regime*, which, having taken as much as it could from the people returned nothing in exchange. The varieties of assistance given may be divided, for the purpose of this summary, into four groups:<sup>31</sup>

### a) Medicine

“Our aim”, wrote the report “is to leave no person without medical attention or medicine”. Since such a task could not be accomplished within the precincts of the *Halkevi* itself, the Party began to open clinics elsewhere, primarily in the poor quarters of the town. To these clinics, 2,157 persons came in 1940 for medical examination, while 288 were given some kind of medical treatment. Of this 1,637 persons were given free medicine, the cost of which is said to have amounted to 967 liras, 30 kuruş.<sup>32</sup>

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29 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

30 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

31 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

32 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

## b) School materials

The *Halkevleri* took on the provision of books and other necessary materials to pupils who, for reasons of poverty, would otherwise be unable to obtain them. Selecting the most deserving cases was not always easy, but the procedure in 1943 was for the schools to submit to the *Halkevi* lists of needy pupils. The Party was unable to do all that it has wished in this respect; but during 1940 it claimed to have distributed as many as 20,367 items of school material, of which 10,825 went to schools in Ankara. Books, which were particularly expensive at that time, were distributed on the condition that the recipient, upon finishing his/her course, was to surrender them to the authorities of his/her school. The whole of this educational material was purchased through the medium of private contributions. However, because this was not reliable basis on which to finance such an important service, the Party began to accumulate a stock built up of orders from Istanbul, upon which the Ministry of Public Instruction agreed to allow a rebate of 25%. The Report did not state the total sum received in private contributions, but as only 1,043 liras, 81 kuruş were dispensed by the *Halkevi* for this purpose, it seemed that they were on a large scale.<sup>33</sup>

Another significant contribution to educational welfare was the work of the *Halkevi* in giving assistance to school-children who, though intelligent enough to proceed to a university or training college, lacked sufficient means to do so. In 1940, for instance, 12 deserving students were enabled, through the help of the *Ankara Halkevi*, to complete their higher education. The Report mentioned several youths who, as a result of such help, secured good and sometimes high positions and who subsequently returned to the *Halkevi* to offer their services in an honorary capacity.<sup>34</sup>

## c) Clothing for schoolchildren

The *Halkevleri* recognised that children of poor parents were at a disadvantage as compared with their fellows not merely in respect of books and similar materials, but in respect of clothes. To prevent “the feelings of poor children being hurt by seeing their better dressed companions”, funds were collected both from the *Halkevi* budget and from various charitably disposed persons. In 1940, for instance, 185 children benefited from this fund, of whom 54 were granted a total of 211 liras to buy such clothing as they needed, while the remaining 37 were equipped private individuals.<sup>35</sup>

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33 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

34 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

35 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

#### d) Food

Even when the children of the poor received all this assistance, they were liable to be worse fed than their companions. The report admits, for instance, that “many children eat only dry bread in the corner of the playground”. Due to the practical difficulties involved, the *Halkevi* realised it could not feed all these children; but an effort in this direction was made by turning a spare room into an improvised dining-hall, in which 127 pupils received lunch daily as from 25 December 1940. The food was cooked “in a manner to give the calories required”, and the expenses were shared between the *Halkevi* and private donors.<sup>36</sup>

The provision of free meals was a charity which was extended to others as well as schoolchildren. Whenever possible, poor families were given practical assistance, especially during the winter months. In order to continue and increase this work, a stock similar to that accumulated by the educational section was methodically formed of food and charcoal. In 1943 this stock amounted to 5,197 kilos, purchased at a cost to the *Halkevi* of 987 liras, 27 kuruş. The People's Party contributed a further 1,000 liras for the same purpose.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.4. Education

As well as helping educational establishments, the Halkevleri conducted a number of educational courses of their own. Among the languages taught at the Ankara Halkevi, English was given precedence with three hours' free instruction a day, whereas French and German were allotted only three hours a week. More than 200 students attended these English lessons, which were organised, and partly conducted, by the British Council's Ankara Director, R. F. Lucas, who reported a waiting-list of more than 50 students. The *Halkevi* also sent a teacher each day to the local prison.<sup>38</sup>

The *Ankara Halkevi* contained a library of about 26,000 books, and in 1943 started establishing small libraries in coffee-houses throughout the country. It also bound books and published the works of its members on a variety of subjects. In 1940, 43 books of this kind were issued.<sup>39</sup>

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36 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Şerafettin Zeyrek, Türkiye’de Halkevleri ve Halkodaları, Anı Yayınları, Ankara 2006. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

37 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Zeyrek, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

38 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Zeyrek, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

39 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Zeyrek, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

The other *Halkevi* functions of an educational nature included (1) missions to country villages, which aimed at enlightening the peasants on medical, artistic and political subjects, and (2) the preservation of antiquities. The *Ankara Halkevi*, built originally using American money, contained a small but well-arranged museum, exhibiting furniture and costume exhibits.<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Finance

The functions already specified, were undertaken together with other philanthropic organisations, such as the Red Crescent Society, the Turkish Aviation Society, and the Society for the Protection of Children. Just as private contributions were needed to supplement the budget, so the *Halkevleri* did not set themselves up as distinct and autonomous welfare institutions, but rather as centres or “clearing houses” of social activity and development. The *Ankara Halkevi* also claimed to have undertaken an expanding volume of work over a period of nine years upon a stationary budget. This was achieved both by the contributions of private individuals and by the fact that, during this time, nothing had been spent upon administration. Excluding the cost of school materials and clothing, 8,120 liras and 10 kuruş were spent during 1940 upon this work. Of this, 4,424 liras and 4 kuruş (54 per cent of the total) were obtained from the sale of tickets for entertainments and from private contributions, while the rest was paid out of the *Halkevi* budget.<sup>41</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

In order to estimate how far the *Halkevleri* succeeded in reaching to the standard originally set by the People’s Party, it must be remembered that the rural *Halkevleri*, besides being much smaller than those of Ankara were faced with a greater variety of problems. The Prime Minister, Refik Saydam, in an address delivered at the *Ankara Halkevi* on 19 February 1939, admitted that one-tenth of the 373 People’s Houses then established had failed to come up to the expected level. The *Halkevleri* programme was an unusually ambitious one; but judging from the attendances at the numerous functions, the good standard of acting and singing reached in entertainments, and the enthusiasm of the students who wished to learn English, the *Ankara Halkevi* at least was, from almost any point of view, a success.<sup>42</sup>

Whether, and if so to what extent, the *Halkevleri* were used by the government and the secret police for “listening in” to, or sounding, public opinion, was not easy

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40 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Zeyrek, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

41 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Ayrıca bkz. Nurcan Toksoy, Halkevleri, Orion Yayınevi, İstanbul 2007.

42 FO624/32, “Report on the Turkish Halkevleri” by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Toksoy, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

to say. It is true to say that the *Halkevleri*, especially if situated outside the big towns, provided ideal centres for the control and testing of popular reactions to both internal and foreign policy. For example, it was said that popular feeling with regard to the non-aggression treaty with Germany was tested, both before and after the event, in the *Halkevleri*. However, it was difficult to judge both how varied this work was and the precise fields in which it operated. *What is unquestionable, though, is that the Halkevleri played an enormous role in the life of the new Turkish Republic. If not in their origin, then in their activities, and even more so in their achievements, they were unique and exemplary institutions, without which even so great a leader as Ataturk might have been unable to carry out the far-reaching changes that he did.*<sup>43</sup>

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43 FO624/32, "Report on the Turkish Halkevleri" by E. W. E. Tomlin, British Council Reports, No: 319, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1943. Toksoy, Passim. CHP, Halkevleri 1940, Ulusal Matbaa, Ankara 1940.

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