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The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders

BÜLENT GÖKAY

On 28 January 1921 the founder of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), Mustafa Subhi and 14 leading Turkish communists were murdered off the coast of Trabzon when they were forced to return to the Soviet Union only one month after their arrival in Turkey. This tragedy dashed the earlier hopes of Turkish communists based on the close relationship established between the young Soviet state and Mustafa Kemal's recently formed government in Ankara. The atmosphere of optimism had inspired and encouraged the leaders of the TKP to initiate the organization of a legal communist movement in Anatolia, a project drowned in its infancy in the cold and dark waters of the Black Sea in January 1921. This incident marked an unfortunate beginning with long-lasting effects on left-wing movements in Turkey: a long and almost uninterrupted period of persecution and repression which continues until today.

On the other hand, the warm friendship established between the Soviet Union and Mustafa Kemal's government long characterized the history of the two countries and seems not to have been seriously affected by the murder of Moscow-based Turkish communists. The supply of material and diplomatic aid by the Soviet state to the Turkish national government continued undisturbed by the Black Sea affair and the early suppression of the socialist movement in Anatolia. Hence the first socialist state of the world sustained her solidarity with a nationalist government which was simultaneously implementing a brutal crackdown on communists and socialists attempting to organize and propagate the very ideology on which the Soviet state was founded.

It was indeed a paradox. How could the young Bolshevik state support a bourgeois nationalist government and steadfastly overlook that government's bloody suppression of fellow communists? How could she ignore the Black Sea incident in her relations with Ankara? One should look for an explanation in the unique factors of the historical moment, in the sensitive and very complex instabilities of the post-war international conjuncture. The main framework of this assessment will therefore be the political volatility of the period and the position of the Entente powers

and the Soviet Union in the area stretching from Thrace to Transcaucasia.

The treaty of Sèvres, signed on 8 August 1920, can readily be taken as a turning point in the chronology of events. The first half of 1920, up to the signing of the treaty, witnessed a continuous increase in friendliness between the Soviet Union and Turkey in the face of the Allies' aggressive moves in Anatolia and Istanbul, and the military operations of the Greek forces sponsored by the Allies. The Greek advance was unexpectedly successful at first, and the Turkish national movement was forced back to central Anatolia. For the moment the outlook seemed highly promising for the Allies. The Turkish national movement, on the other hand, was looking at the Soviets as the only source of help for a war of national independence. The treaty itself deepened this process of polarization still further.

However, following the treaty, the picture began to change: the Western Allies got increasingly alarmed by the Soviet-Turkish closeness while the hopes that they had invested in a possible victory of the Greek army sank irrecoverably. As a result, first the Italian and French, and later the British authorities started to establish working relations with Mustafa Kemal, and only six months after Sèvres, the Kemalists were recognized as the real representative of the Turkish national union. In the period preceding the treaty, the interests of the Western forces had not seemed to depend on the Turkish factor, and therefore the establishment of direct relations with Ankara had not been seen as necessary. However, after Sèvres the Ankara government emerged as a factor which could not be discounted and as the most effective and the most realistic 'card' in securing a long-lasting settlement in the former Ottoman lands. Thus the period following the treaty of Sèvres, the winter of 1920-21, witnessed a very important process. There appeared for the first time the possibility of achieving a workable consensus among the opposing parties in the extremely unstable post-war power struggle from Thrace to Transcaucasia.

The murder of 15 Turkish communists occurred during what might be called the maturation phase of this period. According to the official Turkish view there was no such murder, and the incident is written off as an ordinary maritime accident. Others conclude that the incident was the genuine popular response of local people to ungodly communists¹ Still other accounts interpret the 'Black Sea incident' in different ways, matching additional colours: according to one it was carried out upon the initiative of local [Trabzon] bourgeoisie,² and according to another it was planned by supporters of the former Ottoman government.³ It appears to me that it is as important to understand the motivation which led the

Turkish communists to depart for Turkey full of hope and enthusiasm as it is to investigate the reasons for the murder of the 15 communists. It is significant that their murder was not predetermined by the unique conjuncture of the day. It would be too deterministic and fatalistic to assert such a case. The question of the identity and motives of the perpetrators of this crime is important and highly relevant in explaining the actual fact, but it is not sufficient. Such details will fail to provide further knowledge of the deceased and their reasons for embarking on such a mission. To overcome this, I wish to place this incident in its wider perspective and analyse its significance in terms of the post-war power relations in the region.

The Ottoman Empire, the 'sick man of Europe', officially died with the Mondros Armistice on October 1918, when the chances of survival for a sovereign Turkey seemed to be very remote. Britain, in the name of the Allies, signed the Armistice, thus claiming leadership in the immediate post-war settlement. The Allies settled on the peace terms by the treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920. This treaty detached a substantial part of Ottoman territory, severely limited national sovereignty, preserved the pre-war capitulatory regime of extra-territorial rights for Westerners and even extended it to those Allies who had not previously participated in it, and internationalized the Straits.

This period also witnessed the birth and swift growth of a Turkish national resistance movement, in Thrace and Anatolia. The major international support for the Turkish national struggle came from the Soviet Union, which was itself threatened by the Western powers in the midst of a strenuous civil war. Thus throughout the political upheaval of the post-war period the Turkish national movement and the Russian Bolsheviks found themselves on the same side. Common struggle against the foreign powers threatening both countries led to a mutually advantageous collusion between the two.

In the encouraging atmosphere of friendship between the Bolsheviks and Turkish national movement, left-wing activities gained momentum in Anatolia. Among these the Green Army Association [*Yesil Ordu Cemiyeti*] occupies an important place. The Green Army Association was founded in Anatolia in the spring of 1920 'to liberate Asia from the penetration and occupation of European imperialism'. According to its constitution, the Green Army Association was an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-militarist organization, and aimed to establish a socialist union in the world of Islam by modifying the Russian revolution.⁴ The founders of this Islamic-communist organization were initially on friendly terms with Mustafa Kemal. However, when Ethem the Circassian joined the organization it was regarded as a possible threat to

Mustafa Kemal's authority. Ethem was one of the most prestigious leaders of the early period of the Turkish national resistance, and his powerful rural guerrilla movement, *Kuva-yi Seyyare*, undertook most of the active resistance in Anatolia up until late 1920. The political wing of the Green Army Association set up a group among the deputies of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, called the People's Group [*Halk Zümresi*]. The political programme of the People's Group was an eclectic mixture of pan-Islamism and egalitarian populism. This prompted a hostile attitude from Mustafa Kemal. In a letter dated 14 September 1920, to Ali Fuat Cebesoy, he identifies the People's Group as a dangerous enterprise.⁵

At this point Mustafa Kemal staged a cunning venture. On 18 October 1920,⁶ he instructed some close associates to set up an official communist party (TKF), in Ankara, and through this party applied to join in the Comintern. Although the Comintern refused this application, it was obviously an act geared to secure Bolshevik help, albeit in an unconventional way with a puppet party. The ideology of the TKF was drawn from a weak theoretical argument based on an equivocal difference between Bolshevism and communism. The official party identified Bolshevism as a completely Russian experience, therefore it did not claim to be Bolshevik. On the other hand, although it defined itself as communist, this was a very peculiar type of communism aiming for a 'unique Anatolian regime' which was not to be based on class struggle but would organize rich and poor together to fight the foreign oppressors. It can be argued that this typical populist jargon was far from communism but used the name 'communist' for the sake of its emotional appeal to the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, this step should not be considered separately from political developments in Anatolia. On 31 October 1920, in a telegram to Ali Fuat Pasha, Mustafa Kemal stated his firm belief that communism was not a possible way for Turkey, then went on to explain why he preempted the foundation of an official communist party:

... that this movement [communism] was being diffused in our country from internal and external sources and aiming at various goals, and unless necessary measures were taken, the peace and unity of the Turkish people would be put in jeopardy. Thus it was concluded that the wisest step would be to get some reasonable friends to form a communist party under the guidance of the government.

It is obvious from this statement that an official party was a convenient way to keep any dubious political activity under control and at the

same time capitalize on potential public sympathy towards the Soviet Union.

There was also another communist party founded in the summer of 1920 in Ankara named the Illegal Turkish Communist Party. In this organization a strong ideological influence by the Bolsheviks was clearly seen and some Turkish communists recently returned from Russia took an active part. According to some accounts, Serif Manatov, the first official Soviet representative in Anatolia, played a major role in the formation of this organization.⁸ The programme of the Illegal CP was an explicit manifestation of its Bolshevik tendency. After a couple of months the party began to search for new outlets in order to broaden its base and to acquire a powerful position. As a first move, it became an officially recognized legal party, under the name of People's Commitment Party (THIF) on 7 December 1920. In fact the political basis of THIF differed a little from that of the Illegal CP. The THIF attempted to adapt itself to the specific social and political conditions of Turkey; for instance, the importance of the peasants in the struggle as well as the powerful influence of Islam were given due emphasis.

However, by far the most important communist movement was the Moscow-supported Communist Party of Turkey organized and led by Mustafa Subhi since 1918. Mustafa Subhi was a Turkish journalist who had fled from exile in Sinop to Russia in 1914. Mustafa Subhi was influenced by Bolshevik ideas and began to work with the Russian Bolsheviks during the First World War. He went to Moscow after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 October and began to publish a newspaper, called the New World (*Yeni Dunya*). Mustafa Subhi recruited his group mainly from about 63,000 Turkish war prisoners, soldiers and officers alike, scattered in different camps in Russia and from a significant number of Turkish immigrant workers, especially in Turkestan. In July 1918, a conference of Turkish socialists took place in Moscow and Mustafa Subhi was elected president. In the conference the communist attitude towards the national liberation movements was discussed in detail. Mustafa Subhi announced that Turkish communists had to sever their ties with capitalism and seek no alliance with it.⁹ It is important to note that at this early stage Mustafa Subhi, as the leader of the Turkish communists, seemed determined to oppose any alliance with the national bourgeoisie and adopt a radical approach.

Later Subhi participated actively in the First All-Russian Congress of Communist Organizations of Eastern Peoples in November 1918 became the head of the Turkish section in the Bureau of Eastern Nationalities, and was also made responsible for the Department of International Propaganda for the Eastern Peoples. Subhi had a consultative vote in the

First Comintern Congress in March 1919 where he delivered a brief speech insisting on the necessity of creating revolutionary centres among the peoples of the East. He submitted to the Congress a 'short Report of the Central Bureau of Communist Organizations of Eastern Peoples', mainly on recruitment and other organizational matters. Soon after, in the same year, Subhi became involved in the communist organizations in other regions with a large Turkish population, including Crimea and Turkestan, and set up a Turkish Red Army in Tashkent.

After the overthrow of independent Azerbaijan, Mustafa Subhi and a number of close colleagues went to Baku on 27 May 1920. When Mustafa Subhi arrived in Baku he found an already organized group there called yet again the Turkish Communist Party (TKF). This organization was actually founded under the guidance of Enver Pasha, the most prominent leader of the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) and the former Ottoman war minister. Just after the Mondros Armistice, Enver Pasha, with other leading activists of the CUP, had fled from Turkey and tried to organize a resistance movement to liberate Turkey from Allied occupation. He had gone to Germany, but in August 1920 he travelled to Moscow in the hope of reaching an agreement with the Bolsheviks to organize an anti-imperialist front on the basis of Islamic-Turkish nationalism. Through this front he wanted to regain the former leading role of the CUP. On his arrival in Baku, Mustafa Subhi expelled many of these former CUP activists on the basis that the CUP's Islamic nationalism had nothing in common with communism, and reorganized the activities of Turkish communists in Azerbaijan. He then proceeded to organize new branches of the party in other places, including Istanbul, north Anatolia, Nahcivan and north Caucasia.

These accelerated activities created an increasingly optimistic mood among the leadership of the TKP. The speech of one of the two TKP representatives in the Second Congress of the Comintern confirms this mood. Ismail Hakki, in the Fifth Session of the Congress, disclosed the intention of the TKP to enter into close co-operation with Mustafa Kemal's national movement. According to him, this was 'the best answer to the ruthless exploitation to which Turkey was subjected by the countries of the Entente'.¹⁰ This comment clearly illustrates how, during the course of two years, the party's attitude towards the national liberation struggle in Turkey had experienced a dramatic shift, from complete refusal of any alliance with the national bourgeois movement in July 1918 to the acceptance of close co-operation in July 1920. This implies that the TKP had a strong conviction that it could soon play a determining role in Turkish national struggle in Anatolia. When Mustafa Subhi had been denouncing any co-operation with the national bourgeoisie two years

earlier, neither the circumstances in Anatolia nor the level of organization of Turkish communists was particularly promising, and he had been using a purely theoretical rhetoric against bourgeois nationalism, especially in the days immediately after the October Revolution. However, by 1920 there was what he called an anti-imperialist struggle going on in Anatolia. As the TKP began to see a promising future for its role in Anatolia, it was compelled to adopt a realist policy of compromise towards the leadership of the national independence struggle, namely the once denounced national bourgeoisie.

The decision of the Congress that the TKP should participate in the next Congress with four votes also indicates the rising prospects of its role and future. Furthermore, the Baku Congress, organized by the Comintern in the following month, reinforced the belief that the TKP could be a significant force in the anti-imperialist fight in Anatolia, and encouraged expectation of a fruitful co-operation between the TKP and Mustafa Kemal's movement. As the most numerous ethnic group in the Congress was the Turks, 235 out of a total number of 1891 delegates,¹¹ the future of the Turkish national struggle proved to be a sensitive and important issue in the agenda. The essential aim of the Congress was proclaimed to be to initiate an anti-imperialist platform among the Eastern nationalities. The importance of support to national liberation movements like Mustafa Kemal's was reiterated again and again from the platform. It is interesting that the spirit of united front against the 'foreign imperialist yoke'¹² was further strengthened by a declaration from Enver Pasha,¹³ and an enthusiastic speech given by a representative of the Ankara government.¹⁴

Immediately after the Baku Congress, on 10 September 1920, the First General Congress of Turkish communists met in Baku. Seventy-four delegates participated in the Congress, 51 of whom were identified in the documents of the Congress as from Istanbul and Anatolia. However, this figure should be eyed with caution. Though they were said to be from Turkey, this by no means meant that they had recently travelled from these locations to attend the Congress. Hence one would be grossly mistaken to conclude that the links of the TKP with Anatolia as reflected by this number of delegates indicated a significant level of organization within Istanbul and Anatolia. It was very probably a long time since most of those 51 had left the places they claimed to represent as party cadres. The foremost aim of the Congress was to unite various Turkish communist groups under the Communist Party of Turkey. The Congress also set the task of preparing the programme and constitution of the TKP and adopting a strategy for the struggle in Anatolia. Mustafa Subhi was elected as the General Secretary of the TKP, and a detailed programme

and a party constitution were also accepted in this Congress. A motion was passed to unite the various scattered autonomous communist groups under the banner of the TKP. This Congress has been recognized by the TKP itself as marking its genuine foundation.¹⁵ Given the increasing pressure of the Allied occupation in Anatolia, and the impressive increase in the self-confidence and determination of the TKP, it was not surprising that the first important decision in the life of the young party was to shift the centre of its activities to Anatolia.

Mustafa Subhi and some other leading figures of the party left Baku to initiate the demanding task of transferring activities to Anatolia, and set out for Ankara in January 1921. As is seen clearly in the existing documents, Mustafa Subhi exchanged several letters with Mustafa Kemal before their journey. So far three of these letters have been made public. The first letter was dated 15 June 1920 and signed by Mustafa Subhi and Mehmet Emin, and addressed to Mustafa Kemal.¹⁶ This letter, forwarding best wishes to the Turkish people in the War of Independence, was brought to Ankara by Suleyman Sami in person, another Executive Committee member of the TKP who was also delegated to provide information on the TKP.

The second letter was written by Mustafa Kemal on 13 September 1920, and addressed to Mustafa Subhi and Mehmet Emin as the representatives of TKP.¹⁷ In his reply, he expresses his pleasure on hearing that they share the same aim with the TKP – the struggle for national independence. In the same letter he also describes the organizational form of the Grand National Assembly as being very similar to that of the Soviets, and that it was the supreme body organizing the struggle of Turkish people. He reminds Mustafa Subhi that it would be much better to contact the Grand National Assembly as the only way to initiate and set up political activity in Turkey. Finally he invites a delegation of the TKP to come and contact the Grand National Assembly in Ankara. In response to Mustafa Kemal's reply, a third letter was despatched to Mustafa Kemal in November 1920 by Mustafa Subhi and Ethem Nejad.¹⁸ In this letter the common aim was described as 'the salvation of the country and the people from the poverty and misery'. The writers also asserted their confidence that the necessary sanction to start legal party activities in Turkey would soon be issued by the Grand National Assembly. According to Kazim Karabekir Pasha, Mustafa Subhi and his comrades asked for authorization from the Grand National Assembly to come to Ankara, and the authorization was issued as requested.¹⁹ Topcuoglu notes that the permission to enter Turkey was issued on 15 December by Ankara and on 17 December by Kazim Karabekir.²⁰

The upshot of this brief correspondence was that Mustafa Subhi

decided to go to Ankara in person to discuss how the TKP could operate in Anatolia legally. Mustafa Subhi, his wife, Ethem Nejad and some other colleagues, together with the new Soviet ambassador Mdiviani and his diplomatic mission reached Kars on 28 December 1920.²¹ It was clear that to travel and enter into Turkey with the Soviet delegation might create the impression that they were official representatives of the Comintern. They remained in Kars for a couple of weeks, where, on 2 January Mustafa Subhi met Ali Fuat Cebesoy, who was leaving for Moscow as the first Turkish ambassador. According to Cebesoy, Mustafa Subhi assured him at this meeting that the Communist Party of Turkey did not consider the provincial landed classes and pashas of Turkey as part of the bourgeois class, and the principles of Mustafa Kemal were said to be quite acceptable so far. The following day Mustafa Subhi wrote another letter, which was to be the final letter to Mustafa Kemal. This letter, dated 3 January 1921, was written with a predominantly appeasing tone, and described the Grand National Assembly as 'revolutionary' and praised it warmly. Mustafa Subhi also pointed out that the aim of the TKP was to join in the Turkish national struggle, and he went on to add that they would work to mobilize the support of the proletariat in the European countries. Finally he assured Mustafa Kemal that the TKP would fulfil its role in strict compliance with legislation passed by the Grand National Assembly.²²

In contrast with the amicable tone of Mustafa Kemal's correspondence, the events which followed it were far from friendly. In Kars, two of Mustafa Subhi's colleagues, former Turkish army officers, were arrested on the charge of circulating illegal communist propaganda.²³ It is not very clear whether Mustafa Subhi took this as a warning that something was brewing, but we know that he did not change his route and set off for Erzurum, his second destination on the road to Ankara.²⁴ However, the delegation of Turkish communists was unable to enter the city as a result of the anti-communist demonstrations carried out by the Society of the Safeguard of Religion (*Muhafaza-i Mukaddesat Cemiyet-i*). According to Tuncay, some existing telegrams, found in the Archives of the Institute of the History of Turkish Revolution, show that these demonstrations were directly initiated and orchestrated by Hamit Bey, the governor of Erzurum, and Kazim Karabekir Pasha himself.²⁵ In one of these telegrams, dated 2 January 1921 and sent to Hamit Bey, Karabekir informs that both the Grand National Assembly and the Turkish Foreign Ministry wished this group of communists not to travel to Ankara. He further goes on to ask Hamit Bey's opinion as to how to carry out the wish of the Grand National Assembly. The next day Hamit Bey, in a telegram to Karabekir, suggested the deportation of the communists and added

that he would arrange a suitable set-up himself. In his reply, Karabekir gave his consent to Hamit Bey's suggestion and in addition put forward the idea of organizing protest marches. According to Karabekir, it would be quite suitable if some demonstrations could be organized to give the impression to Mustafa Subhi and his colleagues as well as the Soviets that the Turkish people did not want the communists in Anatolia and would not let them travel to Ankara. Karabekir also adds that the group, upon leaving Erzurum, should be directed to Trabzon, a Black Sea port in the north east. Hamit Bey sent a telegram to Mustafa Kemal on 16 January 1921 in which he reported the decision 'to send back the group to Trabzon for deportation'. Mustafa Kemal's confirmation was received on 18 January.²⁶

Accordingly the TKP group was transported to Trabzon, where a succession of similar demonstrations were taking place. The Soviet consul in Trabzon talked to the governor and asked that Mustafa Subhi and his colleagues should be sent safely to Batum by sea *en route* to Baku. Mustafa Subhi, his wife and 14 colleagues boarded a boat which had been arranged by the self-appointed head of the boatmen, Yahya. Immediately after they embarked, another boat left the harbour and overtook the first one. Following this, all that is known is that no one on the first boat survived.²⁷ The main source on this tragic end is a letter written by Ahmet Cevat,²⁸ a member of the Central Committee of TKP who had remained in Russia, to Pavlovitch, dated 2 April 1921.²⁹

The Ankara government categorically denied any involvement in this murder and insisted that this was a maritime accident. Kazim Karabekir, in his own account, describes the case as a multiple murder, but again refuses to accept any responsibility whatsoever. However, although it is not clear who gave Yahya his orders and used him to commit the murder, it is not difficult to see a link between the murder, Hamit Bey and Karabekir Pasha. Karabekir points to pro-Enver supporters, since a close co-operation between Subhi's group and Ankara might discredit Enver's efforts in the Soviet Union. Hence he claims that the former CUP followers, with or without Enver's direct involvement and under the dubious leadership of Yahya, plotted and carried out the atrocious deed. Given the obvious conflict between Mustafa Subhi's communism and Enver's Islamic Turkish nationalism, it might be possible to interpret Captain Yahya's motives as being pro-Enver. Yet even if this were the case all available documents indicate that the Ankara government had a substantial role in the affair as well. It is clear that Karabekir Pasha and Hamit Bey, one the most prominent nationalist army commander, the other a very important local representative of the Ankara government, put the plan together, so that Mustafa Subhi and his group were directed

to Trabzon where they were put on a boat for Batum. The documents confirm that Mustafa Kemal himself was fully aware of this arrangement.

However, the role of Mustafa Kemal, Kazim Karabekir and Hamit Bey in bringing about the fatal end of the Turkish communists is not clear. There exist no documents or any conclusive evidence as to who master-minded this vicious act. Whether murder was included in the plan drafted by Kazim Karabekir and Hamit Bey remains a mystery. What was actually confirmed by Mustafa Kemal is also obscure and open to speculation. But what is very obvious is that the attitude of Ankara to Mustafa Subhi and his colleagues who had been invited by Mustafa Kemal himself three months before, clearly did not match their invitation at all from the minute they landed in Turkey onwards. It further indicates that either Mustafa Kemal was not genuine in his invitation, or that he changed his mind dramatically in the course of three months. It would be too naive to rely on Mustafa Kemal's reply to Subhi and consider that what he wrote there expressed his sincere feelings, for he was always afraid of political activities out of his own control, especially left-wing ones that might push things too far. His suspicion would surely have doubled with regard to a Bolshevik-controlled organization as it could jeopardize his authority in view of Soviet help. What if the Soviets declared they would maintain contacts with the Ankara government through the Communist Party of Turkey? Indeed, in another letter of Mustafa Kemal to Ali Fuat Pasha dated 14 September, only one day after the invitation sent to Baku, he expressed his bitter feelings towards the Bolsheviks for organizing the Turkish CP and aiming 'to make a social revolution' in Turkey. In the same letter, Mustafa Kemal also added that if the Soviets saw any prospect of communist success in Turkey, they would not initiate material aid to the Ankara government. Mustafa Kemal also remarked that 'communist organizations in Turkey were completely against the interests' of the Turkish national movement and had therefore to be 'brought to a halt and kept at a distance whatever the cost'.

Yet Mustafa Kemal was too skilful a politician not to see the possible consequences of overt opposition. An open confrontation with 'Bolshevism and communism' would endanger Soviet help and damage the national interest.³⁰ He therefore, invited Mustafa Subhi not because he meant that Mustafa Subhi's CP could legally operate in Turkey but because he wanted to gain time. Under the constraints of the conjuncture which made Soviet help ever more urgent, he certainly would not admit to any hostility to the idea of a Bolshevik party. Thus he left the matter open to discussion, pending some unspecified meeting, while in the meantime he would pressurize the Soviets by other means to secure

Soviet help. Indeed, because of the extremely unstable conditions prevailing in Anatolia, delay might well bring some unforeseen developments to assist the Kemalist position.

However, the most important point made by Mustafa Kemal in his letter to Ali Fuat Pasha on 14 September was his conclusion that the Soviets would help the nationalists only when they could see no potential for a communist revolution in Turkey. Indeed, it was Mustafa Kemal's firm belief that there had never been and never would be potential for a Bolshevik-type revolution in Turkey. Yet the problem at that time was to demonstrate to the Bolsheviks that this belief was well-founded, without damaging the close relationship and putting the Soviet help in jeopardy. Especially after the dismay caused by the treaty of Sèvres, the final blow to any hope for a favourable settlement, the gap between the Turkish nationalists and the Western Allies had widened further in an atmosphere of bitterness and resentment. Thus the importance of Soviet assistance in the effort to regain national sovereignty was greater than ever. Therefore, although it was obvious that he identified the Moscow-supported CP as the most serious threat to 'national interests' and an obstacle to prospective Soviet help, he preferred to write a carefully worded diplomatic letter urging Mustafa Subhi and his comrades to contact Ankara through official channels.

In the meantime, the winter months of 1920-21 witnessed a number of momentous events, giving rise to unforeseen alterations in the political equilibrium of the area. First, the uneasy quasi-peaceful relations between Mustafa Kemal's government and left-wing movements in Anatolia underwent a sharp change in the last months of 1920. It has already been mentioned that an official CP had skilfully been launched to keep politicization under control. By taking this measure, Mustafa Kemal achieved a significant degree of success. The Green Army Association disbanded itself and Ethem the Circassian was persuaded to join Mustafa Kemal's official party, and his paper, 'New World' (*Yeni Dunya*), became the official organ of Mustafa Kemal's CP. Yet by the end of the year, mainly as a reaction to the efforts of the Ankara government to reorganize the rural guerrilla forces loyal to Ethem under the regular army, Ethem rose up against the Kemalist forces. Meanwhile, *Yeni Dunya*, now the official paper of Mustafa Kemal's CP, began to criticize the campaign of the government against Ethem, and railway workers were called out for a strike to stop the transport of troops to quell Ethem. In the early days of 1921 the owner of the paper and his close associates as well as many other socialists, who were charged with being connected to Ethem, were all arrested. Hence following the failure of the carrot, the stick, in the shape of naked physical repression, was used to eliminate all

potential sources of subversion which might jeopardize the authority of the Ankara government.

Second, significant changes took place with respect to the Allies. In October 1920, the King of Greece, Alexander, died and the old King Constantine returned to the throne. In addition to this, Venizelos, who enjoyed great support in England, lost the elections at the end of that year. Both of these events suddenly created substantial reasons for the British to relinquish their support for a Greek offensive in Anatolia.³¹ Another change was due to the Kemalists' military actions at the end of 1920. Increasing hit-and-run attacks on British troops both in Izmit and Istanbul had been causing deep concern among the Allied powers. Admiral Robeck from Istanbul had reported back in June 1920, that unless supported by extra forces, British control over Istanbul and the Straits would be extremely difficult to sustain.³² By October 1920 the Turkish national movement had already frustrated the execution of the Sèvres provisions concerning Armenia by reconquering the lands of Turkish Armenia. Turkish-Soviet relations also began to receive serious consideration by the Allied powers. Some British officials, both in London and in the Middle East, began to identify the dangers of a Kemalist-Bolshevik friendship and urged to introduce radical change in the established premises of British policy. They were campaigning for active support for Mustafa Kemal.³³ Meanwhile, on 25 January 1921, three days before the Black Sea incident, the very thing that Mustafa Kemal had long striven to achieve occurred rather unexpectedly: the Ankara government was invited to a peace conference in London.³⁴ This historic move must have been supported by the belief that nationalist Turkey had very little, if anything, to do with communism. On 3 January 1921, Mustafa Kemal in an address to the Grand National Assembly, declared that 'the relationship with the Russians were not based on any opposition to capitalism . . .'.³⁵

Therefore, when the leaders of the TKP arrived in Anatolia, the national movement was not so heavily dependent on Soviet support as it had been three months earlier and had already gained considerable space to manoeuvre between the Western Allies and the Bolsheviks. Mustafa Kemal, approaching the Soviet Union again but in a far stronger position for a better bargain, started promptly to consolidate his home front without the constraint of obligations to the Soviets.

In this bleak winter of 1920–21, the murder of Mustafa Subhi and his comrades, the mass liquidation of an entire communist party leadership, most probably the first case of its kind in the Comintern, did not cause comparable mayhem in the Soviet Union. Neither diplomatic relations nor material aid was suspended as might have been anticipated. The

Soviet government continued a painstakingly cautious approach towards Ankara and kept mutual co-operation within the limits of diplomacy. What happened off the coast at Trabzon, in an area under Turkish sovereignty, was treated as an internal affair of Turkey.

The Bolsheviks accepted the unconvincing official announcement of the Ankara government which described the incident as a maritime accident. In contemporary Soviet reports the Ankara government was accused only of having failed to take the necessary safety measures for the protection of the group. This response compares with the Comintern's harsh protest when a number of communists were temporarily detained in Spain and Yugoslavia in the same year. The Comintern chose to maintain silence over a much more serious atrocity in Turkey. And on 26 February, less than a month after the Black Sea incident, Mustafa Kemal's delegation and the Soviet representatives sat around the same table in Moscow to negotiate a treaty of 'friendship and brotherhood', which was signed on 16 March 1921, the very first ever international treaty signed by the Ankara government. Ankara even sent a delegate to the Third Congress of the Comintern in June-July 1921. However, Suleyman Nuri, a Turkish communist who did not accompany Subhi on his one-way journey but stayed behind to set up a new organizational bureau in Baku, blocked the participation of the Ankara government's official delegate to the Congress. Suleyman Nuri³⁶ condemned Mustafa Kemal's government for the Black Sea incident during the session but continued to stick to the official Comintern policy that they 'would support Mustafa Kemal's movement insofar as it was anti-imperialist'.³⁷

The Soviet state had pursued a consistent policy towards the Turkish national movement, which continued with no significant alteration in the aftermath of the Black Sea incident. The war waged by Mustafa Kemal to regain national sovereignty and establish an independent Turkish state was persistently interpreted as genuinely anti-imperialist by the Soviets. The murder of the 15 communists was not seen as an obstacle to the established Comintern strategy of supporting such national liberation movements, as the latter were seen to be potentially more fruitful in the future. Besides, by helping the Turkish national struggle in the area, the Soviet state would be surrounded by a potentially less threatening belt. Thus an independent Turkish state hostile to the plans of the Western Allies, even headed by a determined anti-communist nationalist clique, would adequately serve this purpose.

NOTES

1. F. Tevetoglu, *Turkiye'de Sosyalist ve Komünist Faaliyetler*, Ankara 1966, p.241.
2. Dr. Koz'min, *Noviy Vostok*, Feb. 1922, p.158, quoted by Y. Kucuk, *Turkiye Uzerine Tezler-II*, p.610.
3. Shaw, S. and E.K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, (Cambridge, 1977), p.344.
4. Y. Nadi, *Cerkez Ethem Kuvvetleri'nin Ihaneti*, (Istanbul, 1955), p.11.
5. A. F. Cebesoy, *Milli Mucadele Hatiralari*, (Istanbul, 1953), pp.474-5.
6. Mustafa Kemal's official party was not founded after March 1921, as Fisher says, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, Vol.I (New Jersey, 1951), p.393.
7. A. F. Cebesoy, *Milli Mucadele Hatiralari*, p.509.
8. R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Harvard University Press, 1954), p.158, and M. Tuncay, *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar* (Ankara, 1967), p.177.
9. Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, p.372.
10. *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, publishing office of the Communist International (Moscow, Dec. 1920), English publication, p.148.
11. Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern*, p.399.
12. *Ibid.*, p.404.
13. Read by Ostrovsky in Russian, *ibid.* p.404.
14. A. F. Cebesoy, *Milli Mucadele Hatiralari*, p.18.
15. Yakup Demir (General Secretary of the TKP), *Yeni Cag*, Sept., 1965, No.9, pp.761-69.
16. F. Tevetoglu, *Turkiye'de Sosyalist ve Komünist Faaliyetler*, pp.223-5.
17. *Ibid.*
18. M. Tuncay, *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, pp.231-3.
19. K. Karabekir, *Istiklal Harbimiz*, (Istanbul, 1960), p.834.
20. I. Topcuoglu, *Neden İki Sosyalist Parti*, p.79.
21. Lazitch and Drachkovitch in *Lenin and the Comintern*, p.412, give Mustafa Subhi's departure date as 16 January 1921. Yet all available documents indicate that it took place at least two weeks before.
22. This letter was not known until recently. It was found in the 'Archives of the Presidency' and published by M. Tuncay in *Tarih ve Toplum*, May, 1987, pp.4-5
23. F. Erdogan, *Türk İllerinde Hatıralarım*, (Istanbul, 1954), p.268. However, another account, A. Cevat Emre, claims that those two stayed back deliberately pretending that they were too ill to travel further, and then turned out to be informers. This account of Ahmet Cevat Emre is given by Tuncay in *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, p.234.
24. It seems that Mustafa Subhi and his group continued their journey without having accompanied by the Soviet delegation after Kars. M. Tuncay, *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, p.234.
25. R.N. İleri, *Ataturk ve Komünizm*, pp.223-4 and M. Tuncay, *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, pp.235-6.
26. M. Tuncay, *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, p.236.
27. There are all kinds of conflicting accounts on the actual incident in various sources. However, the oddest one I have come across is given by Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, p.344, to the effect that 'they were assassinated' while they 'were being sent by boat to Erzurum' from Kars. This is, at least geographically, impossible, for both Kars and Erzurum are inland cities with no water link at all.
28. W. Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, (London, 1957), 2nd edn., p.211.
29. In a later account by Ahmet Cevat in his memoirs, quoted by Tuncay in *Turkiye'de Sol Akimlar*, p.238, it is claimed that only Mustafa Subhi's wife was not killed and that Yahya kept her as a mistress. Yahya himself was murdered one and a half years later through a plot allegedly staged by Ankara government.
30. R.N. İleri, *Ataturk ve Komünizm*, pp.155-9.

31. W. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, Vol.V. (London, 1929), p.386.
32. Public Record Office, FO 371/5170/ E 6541/3/44] and E 6579/3/44.
33. The weekly summary of intelligence reports issued by the Constantinople branch of the Secret Intelligence Service, file 262/44, FO 371/5170-2.
34. FO 371/6464 and FO 406/45, p.58-9, no.25.
35. M/ Tuncay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, pp.249-51.
36. Borkenau is clearly wrong in saying that in the later Congresses and the meetings of the Comintern (after the murder of Mustafa Subhi and his comrades) no delegates from the TKP took part. *The Communist International* (London, 1938), p.294.
37. M. Tuncay, *Eski Sol Üzerine Yeni Bilgiler* (Istanbul, 1982), p.18.

TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

Germany and the Arab Question in the First World War

DONALD M. McKALE

In April 1917, Husayn Ibn Ali, the sharif of Mecca and instigator of the Arab revolt against the Turks and Germans in World War I, received a report from his British ally that the enemy had started a new policy of trying to woo the Arabs away from the British and back to loyalty to the Ottoman sultan-caliph. The sharif, on hearing the news, observed with satisfaction that 'bad and "disorderly" as the Turks and Germans may be, they still understand that the true basis of Islam is Arab!'

Little doubt exists regarding Husayn's contention that Arabs formed the heart of Islam. The British believed this and sponsored the revolt of Husayn and his tribes in the Hijaz which began in June 1916 and which would contribute to the Ottoman defeat two years later. Moreover, Husayn, although considered Britain's main client in the Middle East during the war, was courted as intensively by France from 1914 to 1917. But did the Turks and, more significantly for this article, the Germans realize the importance of the Arabs? The then Turkish and German policy of attacking the Triple Entente in the Middle East by inciting against it a *jihad* collapsed in significant measure because the *jihad* had not taken root in Arabia, the birthplace and, with the holy shrines located there, the center of Islam.

Much is known about the Anglo-Arab relationship in World War I, and recent scholarship has illuminated French policy towards Husayn.² But the few studies that mention the German involvement in Arabia during the war describe it as doomed to failure. The Turks' repression of the Arabs still under Ottoman rule and the British offer to help free them precluded serious German activity among the Arabs.³ This thesis implies that the Germans had little or no interest in Arabs in the Ottoman empire and left matters there to their ally; that they had little or no appreciation of the British threat in Arabia, a major part of the Ottoman empire; and little or no influence on the events in Arabia.⁴ This essay examines these issues and their relevance for explaining Great-Power activity among the Arabs of the Ottoman empire during the war and why it produced the results it did.

Ironically, much of the impetus at the beginning of the war for the

Frank Cass

A Zionist Stand

Ze'ev B Begin

After 29 years of Labor Party rule in Israel, the Likud Party under Menachem Begin came to power in 1977, and since then has played a major role in Israeli politics. Advocating a strong policy in the Middle Eastern affairs concerning the vital interests of Israel, the Likud has been widely criticised in the international arena, but very little is actually known about its roots and rationale.

A member of the Knesset, Dr Begin reflects upon, in his articles and lectures, the mainstream political thought of the Likud. Having attended at home 'one of the best political schools which included free boarding' as he sometimes puts it, he analyses the basic factors relevant to the Israeli position in the Middle East. This can provide angles that run counter to 'common wisdom' which has failed time and again to understand the intricacies of the Middle East, its violent volatility and its growing dangers. This collection of articles may present a fresh outlook of Israel vis-à-vis its Arab neighbours, and may also provide some new tools for the analysis of the political process in the Middle East in the wake of the demise of the USSR.

Ze'ev Binyamin Begin was born in Jerusalem in 1943. He received his BSc and MSc degrees in Geology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and his PhD from Colorado State University. From 1965 to 1988 he worked at the Geological Survey of Israel, heading its Environmental Geology Division and its Mapping and Computer Division. He was elected in 1988 to the 12th Knesset, and joined its Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. He continues to serve in the 13th Knesset as chairman of the Subcommittee for National Security Policy and Defence Forces Build-up.

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