

## Leftist Alternatives to the <Authoritarian Modernisation> ideologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Until 1960)

*There may have been <an> Islamic alternative(s) to the Young Turk/Kemalist Authoritarian Modernisation model, but it is highly doubtful if the Left constituted a real alternative to it. That was rather the proposition of a variant of the same thing. The Left even shared the Kemalist identification of Modernism with Westernism.*

I understand that you intend to use Lipovsky for "After 1960".

But I would like to take odds with the initial paragraph of Lipovsky's Foreword. Though I accept his diagnosis to the effect that the humanistic dimension of Marxism was "conspicuously absent" in Turkish Marxism; both of his cited examples seem ill-chosen and mistaken to me. The Comintern did not criticise localism and nationalism of the Turkish party after 1925. Indeed the implication of the "Separat" (decentralisation) decision in 1936 was to urge it to compromise with the RPP which was of course in a nationalistic orientation. The other cited case, that of the purge of the "Stalinist core" from the left-of-the-centre daily *Cumhuriyet* in December 1991 is also erroneous in qualification. İlhan Selçuk, Uğur Mumcu, Ali Sirmen, Oktay Akbal & co. are nothing but "Left Kemalists", hardly can they be considered as Stalinists. (Incidentally, they came back to *Cumhuriyet* in less than 6 months and forced the lax social democrats to quit their positions.)

### Before 1908

Before the Second Constitutional Period in Ottoman History which began with the Proclamation of "Liberty," the idea of socialism had infiltrated into some segments of the non-Muslim communities. But the built-in internationalism of this ideology was blatantly lacking in most cases; on the contrary, they were all imbued with a strong nationalism. This is true for the socialist currents among the Balkanic subjects of the Ottomans (Serbians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Greeks) and the Armenians. The sole exception were the Ottoman Jews who has little sympathy with the nascent Sionism of their European brethren. The references to the Western socialist movements in the Turkish press were generally critical and negative. Only Namık Kemal, the famous New Ottoman poet and playwright and a few friends of him who had witnessed the events of the Commune firsthand, supported the cause of the Parisian Communards.

### 1908-1925

Immediately after the Proclamation of Liberty, a number of strikes took place in Istanbul and Ottoman cities of the Balkans. Their organizers were not socialists. The importance of these actions came from the resultant reaction on part of the government which was unable to deal with them benevolently, but felt obliged to resort to force in order to suppress them. Necessary legislation was hurriedly made defining a long and difficult procedure for legal strikes. Yet during the first five years of the Second Constitutional Period some workers' movements were witnessed and the emergence of Hüseyin Hilmi's Ottoman Socialist Party in September 1910 which was supported by a few small newspapers appearing one after the other. This organisation though inspired by French socialism, was subjected to continuous repression and it came to regard the achievement of a liberal political environment as its first priority.

The second five years after the 1908 Revolution was a period of Unionist dictatorship. Parvus (Alexander Israel Helphand), a Russian/German Jew who was quite active in socialist struggles came to the Ottoman empire as a newspaper correspondent during the Balkan Wars. The fact that he tried to influence the Unionists to develop a financial consciousness in matters of foreign public debt instead of collaborating with local socialists corroborates the view drawn from the experience of the Ottoman Socialist Party that the strengthening of a bourgeois capitalism was a prerequisite of subsequent socialist agitation.

During the Armistice following the defeat in the First World War, in Istanbul some young Turkish intellectuals who had learned about socialism in European countries where they had studied or worked, organized a real Marxist group: The Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party. Its leader Dr. Şefik Hüsnü (Değmer) and his friend published the monthly periodicals of *Kurtuluş* (Liberation) and then *Aydınlık* (Light / Clarté). They competed with the resurrected Socialist Party of Hüseyin Hilmi which had now replaced the epithet "Ottoman" with that "of Turkey" and successfully led some strikes.

In Anatolia where a national resistance had developed against the invading Greek army, several leftist movements sprouted in the years of 1919-1922. Indigenous ones were tinted with an Islamic overtone and in repudiation of party politics with a tendency for corporatism (proposing for instance a system of professional representation in the general elections). Their main body, the *Yeşil Ordu Cemiyeti* (Green Army Society), mostly composed of MPs, had also a group in the Grand National Assembly which was called the *Halk Zümresi* (People's Faction). This organisation splitted under Mustafa Kemal's pressure into two: one was transformed into an official *Türkiye Komünist Fırkası* (Communist Party of Turkey) in October 1920 and the other was banned and dissolved. Meanwhile a clandestine organisation was founded which was linked with Mustafa Suphi's movement in Baku. This illegal group utilizing the disobedient part of the old Green Army surfaced by the lawful establishment of the *Türkiye Halk İştirakiyun Fırkası* (People's Communist Party of Turkey). Ankara government had various aims and designs concerning each of these manipulated and spontaneous developments. The Green Army had served to counter the Islamic conservative propaganda coming from Istanbul which had accused the nationalist movement for religious infidelity. Indeed, the said society had tried to present socialism/communism as nothing but Islam put into practice. The official TKF which sook vainly recognition by the Comintern was planned to be kept in reserve for the possibility of adverse ending of the war and the ensuing greater dependency on the Soviets. Even the underground Left and its legal appearance as the THİF, might have helped to scare the Western powers with an eventual union with the Soviets. When the Ankara government was invited to London (together with the representatives of Istanbul) for peace negotiations, it was found expedient to suppress all leftist currents to assure the English that a reproachment with Russia was no longer being contemplated. Early in 1921, the official party was closed down, THİF banned and its leaders were put to trial and convicted, Mustafa Suphi and his comrades in the executive committee of the recently established TKP were killed while they were trying to reach Ankara. But the failure to reach an agreement with the English and resumption of collaboration with the Soviets symbolized by Ukranian General Frunze's visit in late 1921 changed the atmosphere temporarily and THİF was allowed to be reactivated for some months in 1922 until the final victory over the Greeks.

The Marxist circle in Istanbul fared with a greater stability during 1921 & 1922 despite allied occupation censorship. In 1923 they even started publication of a daily newspaper, *Vazife* (Duty). They were criticized for their social patriotism and tendency of legal Marxism as well as their intellectualism and negligence of the workers' class. This was the only period in the history of the Turkish Communist Movement when its protagonists acted and wrote in an original manner, quite independently of the Comintern. The fact that then they had supported the cause of the national bourgeoisie is sufficient to demonstrate that they had not a genuine alternative project to the authoritarian modernisation enforced by the ruling party. Indeed most of the republican reforms initiated by the Kemalists as well as their economic policy of replacing the foreign capital with the indigenous were welcomed by the Turkish Communists.

Before 1925, Turkish Communists had acknowledged the revolutionary and progressive nature of the bourgeois-oriented Kemalist régime. They regarded the *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Progressivist Republican Party) a counter-revolutionary venture. This was in conformity with the Soviet evaluation which depicted Ankara government as continuing and implementing the national independence struggle after the military victory over the Greeks and the abolition of the Ottoman monarchy. News concerning the disestablishment of the Caliphate, for instance, was received with great joy by both the local Communists and those in the Comintern. Yet the Turkish party was accused for its negligence of anti-capitalism and support of the national bourgeoisie in its competition with foreign firms which was presented as "anti-imperialism". The slide to the right inside the CPSU (NEP being transformed into a fight against Trotsky's Left Opposition) affected the TKP as it did other sections of the Comintern. The CC of the Turkish party branded its own opponents with names borrowed from that conflict.

## 1925-1936

TKP which convened its third congress secretly in the beginning of 1925 was strictly outlawed in the same year with the promulgation of the Maintenance of Order Act which was a repression measure to deal with the Kurdish rebellion in the east – an attempt, by the way, whole-heartedly condemned by all Communists. But this pretext was used to empower the government to establish an authoritarian rule. TKP was crushed in summer 1925 as part of a general political repression. Persecution of the TKP activists and many of their leaders' fleeing abroad to Soviet Union who were condemned in absentia weakened the party and obliged it to passivity. Vedat Nedim (Dr. Tör) who was not included in the trial was made the general secretary of the party. Two years under his secretariat was subsequently blamed for liquidationism and collaboration tendency with the government. Large-scale arrests took place when he informed the police about the underground work of the party. Next, in the persons of Nâzım Hikmet and followers a left-wing opposition was diagnosed. These were also purged and their line was branded a police-provocation aimed at collapsing the TKP.

A major handicap facing the Central Committee of the party was the friendship policy with the Soviets pursued by the Kemalist government. Therefore, the criticisms levelled by the Turkish Communists towards the government was confined to economic policies. TKP leaders considered Turkey, a feudal Country where the well-to-do fourth of the rural population controlled the two-thirds of agricultural lands. Kemalist government instead of implementing a land reform to redress the property situation, protected loyal feudals and persecuted only those Islamic conservatives and Kurdish nationalists who opposed the régime. Politicians and bureaucrats not only served the interests of the bourgeoisie, but also tried to become bourgeois themselves. Moreover, they compromised with imperialist powers and gave them concessions in order to help internal capital accumulation. Turkey's acquiescence to the League of Nations' arbitration giving Moussul to the British mandate and her acceptance to pay back a share of the Ottoman debts were especially targeted by the Communists. Until 1925 it was hoped by the TKP that the new régime would follow a non-capitalistic developmental path. But afterwards, it became obvious for the CC line that this was an illusion. This verdict, however, was not shared by some heretics.

In May 1926, a party conference was held in Vienna where decisions were taken to activate the TKP and organize provincial committees in Izmir, Adana, Eskişehir etc. as well as in Istanbul. Vedat Nedim who did not comply with these decisions was joined by Şevket Süreyya (Aydemir) who was condemned to ten years of imprisonment in 1925, but was released together with his comrades on the Republic Day 1926 as a result of the changed Penal Code, and by İsmail Hüsrev (Tökin) who had immediately ceased his party membership in his return from Russia. They stressed the importance of the national liberation struggles in themselves, which were considered by the orthodox Communists only as a reserve factor for the world revolution. These people continued to believe that Kemalism was still open to the permeation of the Leftists to follow an anti-imperialist policy and develop the country economically under state control. This group is going to publish a journal called *Kadro* (*cadre*) in the early 1930s. But first, let us follow the chronology of the party.

The Istanbul trial of the Communists in 1927 was exceptionally mild in its sentences: mostly 3 months imprisonment for the organisation of a secret association. Şevket Süreyya (Aydemir) was acquitted and Vedat Nedim's punishment was diminished for his collaboration with the police. They had already parted company with the party. Nâzım Hikmet was convicted to 3 months in absentia at this trial. When he illicitly entered the country in Summer 1928, he was arrested, retried and released as the duration he spent in jail covered the span of the sentence he got. Next year, he convened an opposition meeting which was immediately repudiated by the CC of the TKP as a left-wing deviation. He was purged from the party together with his followers; but they did not recognise this decision and continued to work as an alternative underground party.

Programme of the Comintern adopted by the sixth congress of the Communist International in 1928, classified the countries of the world into three categories according to their developmental levels. Turkey was considered to be in the last category, composed of colonies and semi-colonies. The Turkish delegate Ali Cevdet criticized this and wanted Turkey to be included in the second category, together with the developing Balkan countries, rather than to be seen as a pre-feudal system such as Abyssinia, Libya or Saudi Arabia. He explained Turkey's orientation towards capitalism by means of objective factors such as the weakness and disorganisation of the workers, Turkish bourgeoisie's success in enlisting military support and utilizing the contradictions that existed among imperialist powers, besides a number of subjective factors. Kemalist government's compromise with Western capitalism placed it to a potential anti-Soviet position.

Ali Cevdet pointed out two deviation tendencies inside the Turkish party. One was political collaboration with the government, confining the workers' movement to economic struggle only; whereas the other was a left extremism which threatened the unity of the movement. We can identify the first current with the names of Vedat Nedim, Şevket Süreyya and İsmail Hüsrev and the second with that of Nâzım Hikmet.

In May 1929, TKP organisations in Istanbul and Izmir suffered from round-up arrests, resulting in the convictions of two dozen activists to sentences around four years each, due to their attempt of "forcibly changing the government."

*Inkılâp Yolu* (The Way of Revolution), the organ of the CC which began publication in Summer 1930, branded the new *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Liberal Republican Party) a counter-revolutionary and reactionary stooge of Kemal himself, created in order to prepare the public to a closer relation with imperial powers. The two parties were not really independent from one another, yet the new party was further resembling the defunct Progressive Party. "The Programme of Activities" issued by the same organ as the first number of a new series of booklets, regarded Turkey an underdeveloped, agricultural country, but not altogether devoid of industry, hence comparable to the Balkan countries. The sum of invested capital in industry was conjectured to be around 150 million liras in gold. Only ten percent of it was estimated to belong to the Turkish private or public sectors, the rest was foreign capital. The infiltration of foreign capital helped the awakening and development of the native capital of the indigenous bourgeoisie which began shifting its character from being mercantile to industrial. But the proletariat was constantly oppressed, ruthlessly exploited and kept deprived of any political or social organisation. The Kemalist government was also criticized in the introduction of the programme document for its chauvinistic policy towards the national minorities. The bourgeoisies of these groups were the natural allies of the foreign capital like their comprador Turkish counterparts. The workers of the ethnic minorities had been following the lead of their own bourgeoisies for lack of class consciousness. The mission of the TKP was to oppose the dictatorship of the ruling Republican People's Party and prevent the country from being again prey to world imperialism.

"Theses on the Turkish Question" which was also added to the programme, criticized the policies of Turkification pursued towards national minorities, the manner in which the compulsory population exchange with Greece was implemented, etc. What the TKP demanded was the completion of the requirements of a populist bourgeois revolution and its transformation into a socialist revolution. The aim was implicitly to enlist Turkey into the Soviet orbit.

The last (seventh) Comintern Congress which convened in Summer 1935 in Moscow adopted the policy of anti-Fascist popular fronts. The implications of this new orientation for Turkey appeared in 1936. It was the dissolution of the TKP under the disguise of "decentralisation" from the Comintern. The clandestine trade unions and youth organisations were abolished and the party was reduced to a skeleton. Members were encouraged to join legal political organisations and support the government in its activities serving independence. This was in a way, a reversion to the strategies of the years preceding 1925 and an implicit endorsement of both the *Kadro* line and Nâzım Hikmet's cooperation with legal institutions.

Decentralisation of the TKP did not mean complete cessation from the centre, as evidenced in the official documents of the Comintern secretariat approving, indeed formulating the "Separat" decision. TKP, who now took care to show a low profile, continued to be called "The Turkish Section of the Communist International." Members of the External Bureau of the party left Moscow in mid 1937, leaving Marat (pseudonym of Lâz İsmail) as the party representative in the Comintern. Dr. Şefik Hüsnü (Değmer) went to Poland and then to France. Provisional CC of the skeleton party consisted of three members: Hasan Âli (Ediz) acting gen. secretary, Zeki Baştimar and Vasıf the pharmacist – they were to be joined by Şefik Hüsnü on his return to Turkey. (Tokuzlu)

During the 1930s, Nâzım Hikmet was regarded to be very dangerous by the military, especially by Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, the Chief of General Staff. He was convicted by two separate military trials in 1938 for inciting the army and the navy to rebellion. The first trial in Ankara was concerned with his relations with some cadets (students of the War School). He was sentenced there to 15 years of imprisonment. Besides Nâzım Hikmet, four students and a civilian were convicted to terms ranging between 5,5 and 7,5 years. Some of the cadets who stood to trial were acquitted, but they were still discharged from the school and made sergeants in the army. The second trial took place on board of a military vessel in Istanbul, where he was accused of conspiring with some navy sergeants who had dared to read not only his poems, but also books from the Marxism Bibliotheque of Dr. Hikmet Kıvılcımlı. Two of the sergeants' civilian brothers who were included in this round-up and convicted together with Nâzım Hikmet and Hikmet Kıvılcımlı were to be famous novelists in the years to come: Kemal Tahir (then surnamed "Benerci" – the name of an Indian a character from a novel of Nâzım Hikmet) and Kerim Korcan (a widely read, but not as important an author in the 1970s). Nâzım Hikmet's new sentence here of 20 years was combined with his recent conviction and reduced to a total of 28 years and 4 months. Before the final verdict was passed on him, Nâzım Hikmet is reputed to have composed a petition to the President of the Republic who was deadly ill by this time and could not read it. Nâzım is supposed to have said in summary: "I am not a fool, a rascal, a reactionary, a hired man, nor a traitor to the revolution and the country who could contemplate inciting the military to a rebellion. I take an oath on the Turkish revolution and your head that I am innocent." This story may well be genuine. When he was put to jail, Nâzım Hikmet had been expelled from the TKP several years ago.

During the following decade, aims of the "Separat" decision concerning infiltration into the ranks of the ruling single party and participation in legal organizations and publications were realized in a very limited manner. Communists issued in 1937 a fortnightly Marxist literary magazine (*Yeni Edebiyat*) which they tried to keep non-political, besides contributing articles to progressive periodicals. This magazine was stopped after 11 numbers, but was continued in 1940 for another 26 issues to be banned again by the government. The monthly *Ses* (Voice) which brought out 5 issues in 1939 and another 25 numbers as *Yeni Ses* in 1939-40 followed this. These magazines contained at most, vulgarized articles on historical materialism.

Meanwhile, Dr. Şefik Hüsnü sensing the outbreak of the Second WW, applied for permission to return to Turkey. He was granted it in July 1939, on condition that he would not engage in politics any longer. He was soon drafted into the army as a MD with a captain's rank. Later he was obliged to retire on grounds of ill health.

Some radical sociologists in the Ankara Faculty of Language and History-Geography began the publication of a small monthly journal (*Yurt ve Dünya* – Home Country & the World at Large) in January 1941 which continued as a fortnightly until March 1944, making 42 issues altogether. Most of the group were Left-Kemalists such as Niyazi Berkes and Pertev Naili Boratav; only Muzaffer Şerif (Başoğlu – the social psychologist) and Behice Boran were real Marxists and party members. Indeed, they parted company with this magazine in May 1943 and published their own monthly: *Adımlar* (Steps) for a year. Dr. Şefik Hüsnü in a later report to Moscow boasted that the party had provided guidance to both journals.

TKP had viewed Refik Saydam's government favourably, but regarded Saracoğlu, his successor as a man serving the interests of the profiteers who acted as a racist and fascist in levying a capital tax in 1942 heavily upon non-Moslems & non-Turks. The party was resuscitated in Spring 1943 by convening a CC platform, shortly before the dissolution of the Comintern. It urged the Turkish government to enter the war on the allies' side and against the fascists immediately. A number of articles were contributed to the legal daily *Tan* (Daybreak) exposing the origins and nature of Turkish racism and chauvinism.