

TURKISH PARTICIPATION AT THE
1920 BAKU CONGRESS OF THE
PEOPLES OF THE EAST

According to the hitherto published minutes (in Russian and French) of the Congress, 235 participants were Turks out of 1.275 delegates whose nationality distribution was given. (Grand total of 1.891.) Whereas, according to the recently revealed archival records, 273 participants were Turks out of a total of 2.050. Yet, only 105 were classified under Turkey as "country of origin." One wonders how this category was defined (birthplace?). We further know that merely 74 Turks (party members or otherwise) went to the founding (or unification) congress of the TKP which met a day after the Eastern Peoples' Congress ended.

Turks who took part in the First Congress can be divided into four groups. One of these consisted of Communists who were already in Azerbaijan. Eight names can be given with certainty:

1. Mustafa Suphi
2. Tahsin Bahri (?)
3. Ahmet Cevat (Emre)
4. Mehmet Emin
5. Salih Zeki
6. Süleyman Nuri
7. İsmail Hakkı (of Kayseri)
8. Süleyman Sami.

The rest of this group must be numerous Turkish prisoners of war eager to go back home as soon as possible. (The late Şevket Süreyya Aydemir who gave a vivid description of the congress in his auto-biographical *Suyu Arayan Adam*, presumably was classified in the Azerbaijani contingent, as he was among the Sheki/Nuha representatives.)

The second group were Turkish communists who came from Istanbul specifically for the occasion. They included:

1. Ethem Nejat
2. (Hilmioğlu) İsmail Hakkı (nicknamed the "Arab")
3. Naciye Hanım, his sister*
4. M. Nermi
5. Nüzhet Sabit

* Mr. John Riddell, the editor of the Pathfinder edition of 1920 Baku Congress under the title *To See the Dawn*, before publishing this volume consulted me for identifying three women on some pictures he found in a Swiss collection. One of them should be Naciye Hanım from whose speech he had quoted the title of the book. I wrote to him that I had not seen her photograph before. But judging from her being addressed as "hanım," her being the sister of Ismail Hakkı with a Ph.D. from Heidelberg, she must have been the most bourgeois looking of the three. Hence I have misled him in identification, as I learned from the documentary film on the Congress, the western lookingly dressed woman was in fact Haver Shabanova from Azerbaijan. In the film, there was quite a black woman who I gather now, must be Naciye Hanım. It dawned to me that Ismail Hakkı's nickname "Arab" was not meant in an ethnic sense, but due to his (and his sister's) ^{dark} complexion. There is a tradition dating from Byzantium in Turkey which confuses Arabness with blackness!

A third group was Enver Paşa and his friends who represented the Union of Islamic Revolutionary Associations:

1. Enver Paşa
2. Azmi Bey
3. Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir
4. Küçük Talât (Muşkara)
5. Nail Bey (to be hanged in 1926 for alleged complicity with an attempt at Mustafa Kemal Paşa's life)
6. Baha Said (who had arrived earlier for negotiations with the Soviet military to aid Turkey)

The fourth group was comprised of delegates from Anatolia, one of whom was sent from Ankara by Mustafa Kemal and the rest from Trabzon and Erzurum by Karabekir, i.e. Eastern Army Command.

Mustafa Kemal in Ankara disliked the direct appeal of the Comintern to the people of Turkey over his head. He issued instructions for the representative he picked up, the text of which is printed in Ali Fuat Cebesoy's Moscow Memoirs, where he asks him to stress the revolutionary character of the Anatolian movement, but to warn the Communists to respect its monopoly in

this respect and tell them that chaos would dominate otherwise.

We know the names of the 14 of delegates sent by Karabekir to Baku:

1. Hafız Mehmet (MP from Trabzon, one time deputy Minister of Justice; to be hanged in 1926 for his alleged part in the attempt to kill Mustafa Kemal)
2. Cevat (Dursunoğlu)
3. Süleyman Necati (Albayrak)
4. Major Arif
5. Major Şükrü
6. Liutenant Asım
7. Teacher Asım (who spoke Russian)
8. Lawyer Mesut (Çankaya - elected MP in 1944)
9. Captain Ismail (who took to book trade after his retirement from the army and was sentenced to 7,5 years imprisonment in 1926 for participating in the hat revolt.)
10. Engineer Aziz
11. Lawyer Abdülhalim
12. Ali Kemal
13. Lawyer Ömer (Olgun)
14. Dr. Salim (Cimilli).

Süreyya Şehidoğlu whose 1975 book called *Eylül 1920, Bakü Kurultayı ve Millî Mücadeleye Sağdan Soldan El Koyma Çabaları* is structured around this last named MD's memories which also includes the text of his report to Karabekir on his return. He stated there, "I understood only lately that this meeting did not have an executive nature, but was advisory. It aimed at staging a democratic show towards Europe and propaganda to the Eastern nations. This was a convention of some 3.000 strong brought together with the sacrifice of a lot of money to talk about the merits of communism... <Russians had sent 10 liras for each Anatolian delegate to cover the travel expenses> One representative from each nation was given the floor to speak and one member for every five delegates was chosen to the commissions. We presented a petition with 102 signatures to expose the brutalities of the Dashnak Armenians which was given a wishy-washy reply. <Armenia was not as yet Sovietized!>... Pan Islamist and Pan Turanian policies will cause Russian animosity towards us and increase their oppression over their

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Turkish and Moslem subjects. In all probability they will act with less tolerance towards them in religious, cultural and administrative affairs."

The process started at Baku in fall 1920 was rather abruptly terminated. Why did a radical change occur in Comintern's Eastern policy? Theoretical arguments concerning the correct communist line on the liberation of dependent nations were put forward in the discussion of competing theses of Lenin and M.N.Roy at the second Comintern Congress which convened shortly before the Baku meeting or even they can be traced back to Rosa Luxemburg's early criticism of Lenin's support of their self-determination rights soon after the October revolution. But the practice seems not to have been effected by theoretical considerations. Rather, two sets of development were instrumental in abandoning the plans for a world-wide Bolshevik revolution.

During the summer of 1920, the Polish army under Pilsudsky stopped the Red Army offensive of Tukhachevsky and Budyonni. The civil war was progressing in Bolshevik's favour, but war weariness was wide spread. Soviet Russia now wished tranquillity and stability through a speedy reconciliation with England.

Meanwhile a series of events took place in Turkey which was a pilot case for the Comintern. Turkish Grand National Assembly's Government was invited to a peace conference in London. Mustafa Kemal Paşa who until then implicitly threatened the Western Powers by going Red, now wanted to assure them that he had no such intentions. He purged the Left in Turkey as a preparation for London negotiations. He closed down the official TKP, he suppressed Circassian Ethem's guerilla bands, he had the People's Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Halk İştirakiyun Fırkası*) leaders prosecuted by the Independence Tribunal and wanted Mustafa Suphi and Co. to be repulsed from Anatolian soil - instead they were murdered through a conspiracy arranged by Karabekir in collaboration with the governor of Trabzon. It was an accomplished fact when Ankara learned the affair. But what is important here was the attitude on part of Soviet leadership. Lenin who was in full control sacrificed the cause of Turkish communism for the national interests of the Soviet state and signed a friendship treaty with Ankara government in less than

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two months promising financial and military aid and undertaking a commitment to stop any subversive activity against its legitimacy. Within a few days in mid-March the Soviets made peace with England and Poland.

This is why a "second" Congress of the Peoples of the East was never convened.

Mete Tunçay

TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI
TÜSTAV