

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF HISTORIANS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT (ITH)
23rd Linz Conference 8.-12. September 1987

Report on "The Question of Peace
and the Workers' Movement"

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THE TURKISH LEFTISTS AND THE WAR: 1911 - 1922

"My nation, all the human race and my country, the whole earth..."

Motto of the Ottoman socialist journal *İnsaniyet* (Humanity);
published only twice on the 18th and the 25th of August 1910.
The motto is adopted from the verses of Young Turc poets Sinasi
and Tevfik Fikret, who in turn borrowed the phrase from Victor
Hugo's introduction to his play, *Les Burgraves*: "Avoir pour
patrie le monde et pour nation l'humanité."

Turkey participated in four wars in a dozen years from 1911 onwards: Tripo-
litan (Libyan) War of 1911 against Italy, Balkan Wars of 1912-13 against
Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, First World War of 1914-18 against
the Entente Powers in alliance with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria,
Liberation War of 1919-22 against Greece backed by Great Britain and
France.

These war years, which brought about the downfall of the Ottoman Empire,
also spelled a turning point for the Ottoman/Turkish left movement. The
Ottoman left which enjoyed a period of intense activity especially in such
centers as İstanbul, Salonica and İzmir after the proclamation of the
Second Constitutional Government in 1908, was wiped out under the heavy
repression from 1913 till the end of the I.W.W. While the left underwent a
period of revitalisation after 1918 until the middle 'twenties, this was a
movement drastically changed in character: not only had its geographical
boundaries altered, so had its national makeup. The workers' movement of
Turkey lost the contribution of the hundred thousands of Greek, Armenian
and Jewish workers, which meant a lot with respect to militancy, experience
and organisation.

The Turkish left, confronted with the problems of war and peace at a time
while it was still undergoing its stage of infancy, reacted in a way that
was mainly conditioned by the imminent threat of the dismembering of the
empire. It was only much later, under the influence of the October Revolu-
tion and other revolutionary upheavals in Europe, that a Marxist, class
conscious approach to the questions of war and peace emerged within the
ranks of the Turkish left movement.

The aim of this report is to make a few observations on certain left
intellectuals representing increasingly divergent attitudes within the
extremely complex process cited above.

Mustafa Suphi, the future founder and leader of the TKP, published in 1912
a small book titled *Vazife-i Temdin* (The Civilising Mission) about the Ita-
lian assault to the then Ottoman Libya. At that date Suphi was not a
socialist yet. He had studied political science in Paris after graduating
from the Law School in İstanbul. His booklet exhibits an anti-imperialistic
stand, though he lacks a Marxist consciousness. He mocks stereotypes like
the "white man's burden" used to justify imperialist invasion of under-
developed countries. We have to admit that he was writing as an Ottoman
patriot hurt by the Italian infringement of the Ottoman lands.¹

The Libyan War had caused among European socialists widespread protests against Italy.² (It will be remembered that even Benito Mussolini who was still a socialist, had opposed the Italian aggression.) One sui-generis Ottoman socialist intellectual, in correspondence with the British Independent Labour Party leader Keir Hardie, asked him to organize a mass meeting to invite the English government's intervention to stop this useless bloodshed.³

Ahmet Paşa was a retired Vice-Admiral from the Ottoman Navy, and a member of the British ILP (in all likelihood the only admiral in that party's ranks!). He wrote to Keir Hardie on November 13, 1911, addressing him as "Dear Sir and Brother".

You know that as a socialist, I am neutral. I do not wish to support the Turkish government, but do good to all peoples including the Italians and the Arabs. There is no doubt that this catastrophe has to be blamed on the Turkish authorities who left Tripoli defenceless without soldiers open to an Italian invasion. They have also provoked the Arabs to assault the Italians and hence caused this catastrophe and terror...

Keir Hardie answered his "Dear Comrade Ahmed's" query a month later:

As you have doubtless seen from the press we have been holding meetings and have also written to the newspapers and we have been also acting through the International Socialist Bureau to try to get the war stopped. But we, in this country have been sorely hampered because of the attitude which our government has adopted towards Germany and also in relation to Persia.

It looks to me as though both countries would very soon be exhausted financially and be only too glad to arrange terms of peace.⁴

We know from other documents that Ahmet Paşa was a naive, self-professed socialist without even an anti-imperialistic awareness. Hence, his appeal to his socialist friends abroad (apparently he had no organizational contacts with socialists in Turkey), again, was an expression of Ottoman patriotism or general humanitarianism at best.

It must be noted here that most of the organised Ottoman-Turkish socialists at the time adopted a social-patriotism; besides expressing chauvinistic slogans such as "Ottomans do not emigrate backwards, but always forward", they said:

We socialists, though we are pitiless enemies of the war, wholeheartedly support the present war for the beneficial purpose of serving the civilisation and its progress.⁵

Before Keir Hardie's prediction on the outcome of the war could come true, four Balkan states declared war on Turkey. And she had to conclude peace hurriedly with Italy in order to fight against them.

Ahmet Paşa wrote again to Keir Hardie on October 28, 1912, accusing the (Czarist) Russian and Bulgarian intrigues for the new man-slaughter. He also blamed other Powers' provocations for their selfish interests only, and said "Doubtlessly, such things will not happen, once socialism will be in power".

Ahmet Paşa feared that the fight in the Balkans could expand into a full-fledged European War, and therefore he served as a member in the international advisory council of the European Unity League, established in 1912 by an English Justice of Peace, Sir Max Waechter to prevent such a general armed conflict already approaching.⁶

In yet another letter to Keir Hardie dated January 23, 1913 Ahmet Pasa raises an important point, when he accuses the Western States of pushing the Turkish Government to undertake reforms only to benefit the Christian population instead of serving humanity at large.

Other (Moslem) peoples are also suffering from the same causes. Therefore, the people here would welcome any power who would force the Turkish Government to make reforms for the whole population without any discrimination. Had the (Balkan) allies, instead of waging a crusade, declared war to save the whole population from the Committee's despotism and misadministration, and instead of looting and killing and exiling the Turks, had they established a just order for all, they too would be cherished and welcomed.⁷

Ahmet Pasa ends his letter by reminding his correspondent of the precepts in the Matthew Gospels (v. 39, 40, 42 & 44) about an endless compassion and love for the enemy as well as for friends.

The process leading to the Balkan War, and the war itself, naturally concerned most closely the left movement in this region. Salonica, which at times exceeded even Istanbul in importance for the left movement, and where five different ethno-cultural communities coexisted, was the hub of the discussions on war, peace and the future of the Balkans.

With Jews and "Dönme's" (converts) comprising the majority of the population and represented by a large proportion in the workers' movement, the prevailing sentiment was in the direction of safeguarding the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The Bulgarian Left Social Democrats (Tesnyaki), on grounds of internationalism, also advocated the integrity of the European territories of the Empire. On the other hand, most of the Greek socialists and a section of the Bulgarians espoused nationalistic positions.⁸

This debate was brought to an end by the Balkan War, which culminated in a re-parceling of the Balkans on a national basis, with Salonica landing in Greece.

The appeal, dated 3rd August 1913, of the Socialist Workers' Federation of Salonica to the Socialist International Bureau graphically illustrates what war had in store for the workers' movement.

"...the economic life of our city has become nil. The whole working class has been almost completely disorganised...

"The conflicts which were already brewing since before the declaration of the War have become much sharper, especially in our largest trade union, the tobacco workers' union.

"The long lasting unemployment and the emptying of the trade union coffers were the reasons for the complete dissolution of some organisations...

"The entry of the Greeks into our city has meant a series of coercive measures, which have immeasurably damaged our movement. First come the declaration of Martial Law: no gatherings, no demonstrations, no meetings, no discussions - thus, the end of all activity. This spelled to a large extent the death of our movement. During this time, the only sign of life we could give was through our paper, which nevertheless came under heavy censorship.⁹

The series of defeats suffered by the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars continued with the First World War. With every passing year, the Union and Progress leaders relinquished more and more their Ottomanism and fell back upon an increasingly chauvinistic and aggressive Pan-Turkism. On the other hand, they tried to break out of their isolation. That is why towards the end of the war the Union and Progress government, who had taken highly representative measures against the left and exiled its leaders, started to make overtures to international socialism.

It may be of some interest here to note the Union and Progress attempt at participation of this delegation in the Stockholm Conference. The Ottoman government sent delegates of "official" socialists, ostensibly representing a native Socialist Party which was in fact especially created for the purpose.

"The government held that since war united all classes, there should be an end to class struggle. To this end, the class organisations and associations were disbanded. However, soon the Young Turks once more needed the support and sympathy of the workers and had to make up to them.

"A bourgeois-police "Socialist" party was founded in which capitalists, lawyers, even generals were members. In the year 1917, this "Socialist" bourgeoisie and their guards wanted to participate in the International Socialist Congress in Stockholm, as the Turkish Socialist Party. The grand vizier Talât Pasa even ordered the Directorate of Security to prepare for this occasion a special rubber stamp inscribed as Turkish Socialist Party.¹⁰

However, the information published up to now on the participation of this delegation in the Stockholm Conference is highly contradictory and controversial. A historian of the relations between the Turks and the Jews writes that two delegations were sent to Stockholm (one in May and one in August?) each composed of three persons.¹¹ A different source even reproduces quotations from the speech made by one of the delegates at the Conference where he purportedly also engaged in a discussion with W. Rosanoff on the question of nationalities on 14th July 1917.¹² On the other hand, Soviet historian Snurov claims that "these delegates were turned away from the Conference in disgrace"¹³. Similarly, according to George Haris, although two delegates were sent - the second one in August - "their efforts were in vain. Though they presented a note to the Conference (...) the Conference refused to accept them as delegates"¹⁴.

Nevertheless, the minutes of the Organising Committee of the Stockholm Conference and related material do not corroborate these claims. The documents of the Organising Committee reveal that on the 13th of July two delegates from Turkey have made oral depositions on the general basis of peace and on international conventions¹⁵. In a mimeographed text titled Conférence Socialiste Internationale de Stockholm: Programmes déposés par les Partis a somewhat different version of the events is given. According to this text the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee has received, on the 12th of July, "a delegation from workers' organisations in Turkey for the purpose of getting information". The summary of the interview, entitled "Turkish Socialists", informs us that "two socialists arrived with the purpose of seeking admission to the Conference and affiliating the Turkish socialists with the International Socialist Bureau". The summary contains the views of this delegation upon the question of the Straits and the Armenian question..¹⁶

In the minutes of the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee, taken down in Camille Huysmans hand, there are the minutes of an interview with these two delegates, which, besides the issues covered in the notes of the oral depositions and the summary cited above, also touches upon others.¹⁷ Although the issue of the admission of the delegation to the Conference is raised twice in the minutes of this interview, there is no indication either here or in other extant documents relating to the Conference, that this issue was ever definitively resolved.

We may conclude from the material at hand, that the Turkish delegation was heard by the Organising Committee as were the delegations from the minority groups of some European parties and delegations from various Asian and African countries. Since the Conference never actually convened however, we believe that the question of admission or rejection of the delegation never became a matter of practical importance.

The fact that a delegation under the guise of "Turkish socialists" were sent to participate in an international socialist conference, nevertheless remains remarkable in its own right. This delegation sent by the Union and Progress Government espoused the principles of a just and durable peace without annexations or indemnities, as articulated by the Petrograd Soviet, and the right to self determination of nations. In this way, the precedent was set for the founding, a few years later, of an official Communist Party by the Kemalists and their attempt to establish relations with the Third International.

While the I.W.W. had grave consequences for the Turkish workers' movement, it also led to a series of contacts with the international workers' movement at an unprecedented level and scale. Thousands of workers and students who spent the war years in Germany and witnessed the subsequent upheavals; more than sixty-thousand Turkish prisoners of war in Soviet Russia, some of whom had actively taken side and taken part in the civil war; the thousands of immigrant workers in close-by regions of the Soviet Union; and a non-negligible number of workers who took part in the Hungarian Revolution of 1919; all brought back with them their unique experiences.

Mustafa Suphi, who had vehemently opposed the Union and Progress Government, was subsequently banished to Sinop on the Turkish Black Sea coast, fled, just before the war, to Russia as a political refugee. After he became a bolshevik and the October Revolution took place, he began publishing a newspaper in Turkish language: Yeni Dünya (New World/Novyi Mir). His editorial article in its first issue condemned the Unionist leaders for neglecting the general interests of the society at large and causing all these miseries through their short-sightedness. Suphi cited the bloody revolts in Albania, Yemen, Havran and resented that Islamic lands were being deserted as a result of Libyan and Balkan Wars. Writing in April 1918, he could not predict the implications of the defeat of the alliance to which Turkey belonged, but he warned the Turks about new dangers a German victory in the east would bring to the peoples of Asia Minor. He incited the Turkish nation to action by using their democratic and constitutional rights. If they did not succeed in such a struggle, he foresaw that the already established political slavery would be doubly reinforced with economic slavery as well.¹⁸

Towards the end of the First World War, after the October Revolution, the Ottoman army started an invasion campaign to the north shores of the Caspian Sea and towards Iran and Turkestan. A small group of Turkish revolutionaries, composed of refugee intellectuals and prisoners of war from Turkey as well as some local Tartars organised as "Moslem Socialists" in Moscow, vehemently protested against this Pan-Turanian offensive adventure. Mustafa Suphi, speaking at the First Congress of the Comintern in March 1919, proudly told his listeners how they opposed the Turkish imperialism in the name of revolution and humanity. In the same speech, he relates an example for the progressivist attitude of young Turkish intelligentsia. In the University of Istanbul during the war years there were a number of German professors who wanted the university to nominate Kaiser Wilhelm I for a Nobel peace prize. Thereupon the students rebelled against their teachers' pressures and proposed instead, Lenin's candidacy for the prize. (This news was also reported in Mustafa Suphi's Turkish language newspaper Yeni Dünya).¹¹

The concluding sentences of Mustafa Suphi's speech at the I. Congress of Comintern reflect his enthusiasm and what might be considered excessive optimism with regard to the post-war era and balance of class forces in Turkey:

"Due to its geographical position, Turkey has always served as a bridge between Asia and Europe, and has been under the direct oppression of capitalism. This leads us to believe that also in the course of the coming world revolution, the Turkish proletariat will take a place of honour.

"We are convinced that the Turkish proletariat will put all of its strength in the service of supporting and further developing the social world revolution. And should the world revolution be crowned with the victory of the proletariat, we propose the legendary city of Istanbul as the capital to be of the International.

"We dream that, when the time comes for thousands of representatives of the proletariat from all corners of the world, from all nationalities and races, to assemble, they will choose for this purpose the largest and most beautiful building of the world, the Agi-Sophia; and then, truer equality and freedom preached in this temple than had ever been before from the mouths either of Byzantine Patriarchs or from Moham-medan Khaliphs. Thereby the unnatural war between the Crescent and the Cross, in whose name so many have been sacrificed, will also come to an end."¹⁹

The enthusiasm and deep conviction on the part of Mustafa Suphi and his comrades made it "mandatory" for the Turkish bourgeoisie to liquidate them. And Suphi and 14 of his comrades, some of whom were members of the central committee of the TKP, were murdered under dark circumstances on the Black Sea on the way to Ankara.

Two and a half years later, at the first Congress of the TKP, various speakers analysed Turkey's situation after the defeat in the War.²⁰ One delegate (Ahmet Cevat Emre) accused the last Sultans for acting as accomplices of imperialist powers solely for egoistic motives. After blaming Abdulhamid II, the speaker claimed that Sultan Resad's pacifism and constitutionalism were also false. He reminded the audience that the Sultan was excited during the defence of the Dardanelles and wrote imperialistic verses in praise of Ottoman militarism. He became a tool of the Young Turk government

for its Holy War and Islamic Unification policies and signed treaties surrendering important parts of the country to the enemy.

Another delegate (Hilmi oğlu Hakki) in his presentation on the question of colonialism, drew attention to Karl Marx's pro-Turkish attitude against Czarist Russia during the Crimean War, and said that the Russian Soviet State of today as the real inheritor of Marx's legacy, protects Turkish peasantry against European imperialists.

The delegate who introduced the discussion on the National Question (Nazmi), spoke about the agitation by the Turkish, British and Russian governments of the poor masses during the war. The Dashnak Armenians incited to rebellion by the Russian and British governments were pitilessly punished by the Unionist Turkish government serving German policy, through deportation and massacre. Greeks agitated by the British and their own priests resorted to terror against innocent Turkish people. Again the Young Turkish government retaliated. Millions of poor people suffered and died as a result of imperialistic and chauvinistic interest of great robbers. The only viable solution is to bring down the bourgeois revolution, break their class dictatorship and to establish a social revolution and independent Soviet government in Turkey.

A similar, but more general hope was already voiced by a radical journalist (Zekeriya Sertel) two years before in an article in Zaman (22 August 1918) where he claimed that European peace could only be established through the inevitable victory of socialism all over the world.²⁰

Not all Turkish leftists approached the peace issue in such terms. The so-called Turkish Socialist Party was pro-British and cherished hopes for England's protection. The Social Democrats were pro-American. Their leader (Dr. Hasan Rıza) declared in the Imperial Council which convened on 26th May 1919, that they favoured the peace principles proposed by the humanitarian President Woodrow Wilson. Of course, both the Socialist and the Social Democratic parties opposed the Anatolian resistance. These tendencies of the Turkish socialists who adhered to the Second International were severely criticised by the orthodox Marxists²¹, and were, moreover, much behind the position taken by the Socialist International, as exemplified by the resolution on the Greek occupation of Anatolia, adopted by the Conference of the Socialist International, Luzerne 1919.²²

During the Turco-Greek War, which is also called the Turkish Liberation Struggle, besides to an extent the underground TKP, there were certain leftist movements who tried to reconcile socialism with Islam. The settlement these people had in their minds for the long run was an Islamic peace, which was peace in the sense of Pax Romana. They strongly supported the liberation war. For instance, we read in the Green Army Instructions, the following: (article 31) "The Green Army is an organization for the happiness of humanity. In its eyes to shed blood, to widow the women, to leave the children helpless is the greatest evil in the world. Yet, as it is imperative to destroy the present organization in order to save the people from militarism, from their suffering under politicians, from poverty, from the abuses of capitalism, we are lamentably obliged to continue with war until the realisation of our objectives."²³

The "officially" created "Communist Party" of the Kemalists adopted an ideological position of nationalism, claiming that the rich and the poor could unite in a common war against capitalism if its evils came from abroad and did not emanate internally.²⁴

The illegal TKP declared in their earliest statutes that (article 7) "The Turkish Bolsheviks refuse war and militarism and all the inequalities and injustices deriving from them. They deem struggle and war legitimate only until the destruction of all militarism and imperialism." In their later programme, they also demanded the organisation of revolutionary red armies for the defence of the workers and peasants, with the same justification.²⁵

On the eve of TKP's Second Congress in August 1922 at Ankara, the Turkish communists supported the Soviet persecution of the SR party leaders in Russia, remembering that the temporary government which they constituted after the February Revolution of 1917, kept up with the war waged against Turkey to seize the Straits and some eastern provinces.²⁶

A representative of the Union of Turkish Communist Youth, Ismail Hakki, contributed from Istanbul an article entitled, "The duty of the Turkish youth in the Red Youth Week" to the Bulgarian Communist Party's Turkish newspaper Ziya on 19th August 1922. After denouncing war with strong words (human butcheries in the fronts, illegitimate war gains, capitalistic exploitation of the economic crises, etc.), he calls for the proletarian dictatorship arguing that "the salvation of a nation from slavery and poverty cannot be brought about with the destruction of her external enemies - it is an impossible task to accomplish - but through her protection against her internal enemies, the double-faced savages who kill her."²⁷

The two groups, one in Ankara and one in Istanbul, composing the TKP, separately made declarations of support to the Kemalists fighting the Greek invaders and appealed to both sides in war, asking the Greek communists to surrender to the Turks and the Turks to behave humanely towards them. (See "Mazhar"s speech in the 4th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in June 1922.²⁸ "Mazhar" was a pseudonym of Dr. Sefik Hüsnü Degmer who represented the Istanbul communists. The Greek delegate too gave a speech in Turkish at the same congress. Also see the "Appeals" to the Turkish and Greek armies, published in Yeni Hayat, organ of the People's Communist Party of Turkey, as the Ankara group was known under this name.²⁹) Yet the Turkish Communist support for Mustafa Kemal was cautious and conditional. They feared that he could at any moment switch to a "treacherous" foreign policy and compromise with the Entente states.³⁰ One ideologue exclaimed that in the pages of Aydınlık, the intellectual Turkish communist monthly journal³¹:

"The political independence for which the Anatolian soldiers sacrificed their blood can only be established on an economic basis. (...) If Turkey cannot be rendered into an agricultural country, a country of production, then all the bloodshed in the past and will be shed in the future will be a sin and a crime of murder against the nation and the humanity at large."

NOTES

1. M. Tuncay, Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar 1908-1925 [to be referred to subsequently as TSA] Ankara: Bilgi Yay., 1978, 3rd ed., pp. 195-96, fn. 166.
2. See: "Resolution on the Situation in Turkey", Kopenhagen Int. Soc. Congress 1910, in: International Institute of Social History Archives [to be referred to subsequently as IISG] Coll. II. Intern. D. 470. Also: Bulletin Périodique, n. 8,9 (1912) and n. 10 (1913).
3. M. Tuncay, Bilinecegi Bilmek [To Know the Unknowable], Istanbul: Alan Yay., 1983, pp. 166-97. As Ahmet Pasa's letters are translated in this book into Turkish, our rendering them back into English again here may slightly differ from the originals.
4. TSA, pp. 64-65.
5. From the Istirak of September 26, 1928 (9.10.1912), see: TSA, p. 60, fn. 68.
6. TSA, p. 63, fn. 75.
7. Bilinecegi Bilmek, p. 190.
8. See: G. Haupt, "Le début du mouvement socialiste en Turquie", Le Mouvement Social, Oct-Déc 1963, n. 45, pp. 121-137 and Paul Dumont, "Sources inédites pour l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier et des courants socialistes dans l'Empire Ottomane au début du XXe siècle", Etudes Balcaniques, 1978/3, pp. 16-34.
9. Circular No. 13 of the International Socialist Bureau, IISG, Coll. II. International, D. 178, p. 1.
10. Snurov, Türkiye Proletaryasi [Turkish Proletariat], Yar Yayınlan, Istanbul 1973, p. 40.
11. Avram Galanti, Türkler ve Yahudiler: Tarihi ve Siyasi Tethik [Turks and Jews: A Historical and Political Investigation], Istanbul: Tan Matb. 1947, 2nd ed., p. 91.
12. Hilmi Ziya Ülken, Türkiye Çağdas Düşünce Tarihi [History of Contemporary Thought in Turkey], Vol. 1, Istanbul 1966, p. 437-38.
13. Snurov, ibid.
14. George Harris, Origins of Communism in Turkey, Stanford, California, Hoover Inst. 1967, pp. 31-32.
15. Comité Organisateur de la Conférence Socialiste Internationale de Stockholm, Stockholm, Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1918, pp. xiv-xv, 365-367.

It must be acknowledged that the above mentioned Unionist delegates were really from the "left" wing of their party. According to a news item in the London Times of April 11, 1923, one of them, Salâh Cimcoz, contested in the general election for the new Ankara Grand National Assembly as a "socialist candidate".

16. Conférence Socialiste Internationale de Stockholm: Programmes déposés par les Partis, n.p. 1917, mimeographed, p. 123, 127-128; IISG, Coll. II. Int., D 240.
17. IISG, Bureau Socialiste Internationale Collection, D 47. We wish to thank Jan Gielkens of the IISG for deciphering Huysmans handwriting.
18. See the transcription of his article addressing "Cenup'taki Türk Yoldaslarina, Türk Kardaslarina" [Turkish Comrades and Turkish Brothers in the South], in: Tarih ve Toplum, nr. 37, Joni 1987, pp. 37-39.
19. "'Bericht aus der Tuerkei' von Gen Subhi", IISG, Collection H. Sneevliet, D 189. The above quoted sentences of Suphi's Comintern speech have not previously appeared in print. We are grateful to our colleague Akito Yamanouchi for drawing our attention to the H. Sneevliet Collection as possibly containing material relating to Turkey and thereby making it possible for us to bring to light the complete text of Suphi's speech.
20. Mete Tuncay, Eski Sol Uzerine Yeni Bilgiler [New Light on the Old Left] Istanbul: Belge Yay, 1982, pp. IIIff and 82-89.
21. TSA, p. 65, fn. 77.
22. TSA, p. 86, fn. 129 and Eski Sol..., p. 124; "Resolution über die Balkanfrage", IISG, Coll. II. Int., "La Conférence Socialiste Internationale Luzerne 1919", D 333.
23. TSA, p. 396.
24. TSA, p. 164.
25. TSA, pp. 387 and 413.
26. TSA, p. 505.
27. Eski Sol..., p. 276-78.
28. Eski Sol..., p. 268.
29. TSA, pp. 268-69.
30. TSA, pp. 269-70, 280-81 and 287, fn. 259.
31. TSA, p. 337: Vedat Nedim Tör in issue nr. 17 (August 1923.).

The Turkish Leftists and War: 1911-1922

"My nation, all the human race and my country, the whole earth..."

Translation of the Ottoman Socialist journal Insaniyet's motto; published only twice on the 5th and the 12th of August 1326 (18 and 25 Aug.1910). The motto is adopted from the verses of Young Turc poets Şinasi and Tevfik Fikret, who in turn borrowed the phrase from Victor Hugo's introduction to his play, Les Burgraves: "Avoir pour patrie le monde et pour nation l'humanite."

Turkey participated in four wars in a dozen years from 1911 onwards: Tripolitan (Libyan) War of 1911 against Italy, Balkan Wars of 1912-13 against Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, First World War of 1914-18 against the Entente Powers in alliance with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, Liberation War of 1919-22 against Greece. Some socialist intellectuals and organisations reacted to these bloody events. In addition to these external wars, after the proclamation of the Republic, Turkey lived through a protracted civil war due to the rebellion of the Kurds in her eastern provinces. During the inter-world-war years of 1918-39, the Turkish government pursued on the whole an anti-revisionist foreign policy and in spite of the suspicions of the illegal TKP, kept her loyalty to the Soviet friendship.

Mustafa Suphi, the future founder and leader of the TKP, who was going to be killed in January 1921 at the early age of 38, published in 1912 a small book titled Vazife-i Temdin (The Civilising Mission) about the Italian assault to the then Ottoman Libya. At that date Suphi was not a socialist yet. He had studied political science in Paris after graduating from the Law school in Istanbul. His booklet exhibits an anti-imperialistic stand, though he lacks a Marxist consciousness. He mocks stereotypes like the "white man's burden" used to justify imperialist invasion of underdeveloped countries. We have to admit that he was writing as an Ottoman patriot hurt by the Italian infringement of the Ottoman lands.¹

Libyan War had caused among European socialists widespread protests against Italy. (It will be remembered that even Benito Mussolini who was still a socialist, had opposed the Italian aggression.) One sui-generis Ottoman socialist intellectual, in correspondence with the British Independent Labour Party leader Keir Hardie, asked him to organize a mass meeting to invite the English government's intervention to stop this useless bloodshed.²

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It looks to me as though both countries would very soon be exhausted financially and be only too glad to arrange terms of peace.³

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Ahmet Paşa wrote again to Keir Hardie on October 28, 1912, accusing the (Czarist) Russian and Bulgarian intrigues for the new man-slaughter. He also blamed other Powers' provocations for their selfish interests only, and said "Doubtlessly, such things will not happen, once socialism will be in power."

In another letter of December 29, he concludes that there can be no peace, brotherhood and happiness in Turkey as long as the Committee of Union and Progress exists, still bidding for power. On January 6, 1913 he complains that no European Power attempted to stop the bloodshed. According to him, in internal politics Unionist officers are utilizing the war for their own purposes to take the political power in their hands. He says:

...[A] member of the ruling class organizes armies from poor soldiers and sends them to the front to kill and to get killed in thousands, for his personal glory, for religion and for heaven. ... The whole population of places under Greek and Bulgarian occupation are exiled, looted, women raped and many slaughtered. Especially in the (Aegean) islands the Greeks are torturing and massacering others. Thousands of people are emigrating here, almost naked. Many perish on the way from cold and hunger. I can say no human being can be worse than a Greek priest who permits such slaughters. Moslem priests are also bad, but they at least would not allow the civilians war prisoners and surrendered to be thus murdered.

Ahmet Paşa feared that the fight in the Balkans could expand into a full-fledged European War also, and therefore he served as a member in the international advisory council of the European Unity League, established in 1912 by an English Justice of Peace, Sir Max Waechter to prevent such a general armed conflict already approaching.⁴

In yet another letter to Keir Hardie dated January 23, 1913 Ahmet Paşa raises an important point, when he accuses the Western States for pushing the Turkish Government to undertake reforms only to benefit the Christian population instead of serving humanity at large.

Other (Moslem) peoples are also suffering from the same causes. Therefore, the people here would welcome any power who would make force the Turkish Government to reforms for the whole population without any discrimination. Had the (Balkan) allies, instead of waging a crusade, declared war to save the whole population from the Committee's despotism and misadministration, and instead of looting and killing and exiling the Turks, had they established a just order for all, they too would be cherished and welcomed.⁵

Ahmet Paşa ends his letter by reminding his correspondent of the precepts in the Matthew Gospel (v. 39, 40, 42 & 44) about an endless compassion and love for the enemy as well as friends. In a few days after he wrote this letter, what Ahmet Paşa feared most, happened in Turkey. The military wing of the Union and Progress Committee toppling

the government with a coup d'etat, took the power itself. Yet due to the internal strives of the Balkan allies, Turks succeeded to recover eastern Thrace which they had lost to Bulgaria in the first stage of the war. But Salonique was gone to Greece for good. With the loss of western Thrace, Ottoman socialists were deprived of their most developed sections of nationalities. The Greek and especially the Bulgarian socialists had sided with their own nationalist governments, but the Jewish socialists who were dominant in the Salonique left, were for the status quo and pro-Turkish administration, hence internationalist and peace-abiding in the region.

It must be noted here that the organised Ottoman-Turkish socialists at the time adopted a social-patriotism; besides expressing chauvinistic slogans such as "Ottomans do not emigrate backwards, but always forward," they said:

We socialists, though we are pitiless enemies of the war, wholeheartedly support the present war for the beneficial purpose of serving the civilisation and its progress.⁶

We possess the texts of three more letters by Ahmet Paşa to Keir Hardie written in September 14, October 22 and November 1 of 1914. In spite of his strong pro-British sentiments, he was shocked to see Britain in the alliance of Russia, believing that Panslavism was the exact opposite of all freedoms, civilisation, education, honesty, modesty, humanity etc. He sincerely wished that Germany would break the reactionary Russian power. In his second letter, he criticized the English monarchy and lamented the loss of traditional prestige enjoyed by the English in the Near East. Lastly, he hoped that this bloodshed could be stopped through the valuable and equitable efforts of enlightened people like his correspondent. (Keir Hardie died in 1915.)

Mustafa Suphi who had vehemently opposed the Union and Progress Government, subsequently was banished to Sinop on the Turkish Black Sea coast and from there, he fled to Russia as a political refugee just before the World War. After he became a socialist and the October Revolution took place, he began publishing a newspaper there in Turkish language: Yeni Dünya (New World / Novyi Mir). His editorial article in its first issue, condemned the Unionist leaders for neglecting the general interests of the society at large and causing all these miseries through their short-sightedness. Suphi started his complaints with the bloody revolts in Albania, Yemen, Havran and resented that Islamic lands were being deserted as a result of Libyan and Balkan Wars. Writing in April 1918, he could not predict the implications of the defeat of the alliance to which Turkey belonged, but he warned

the Turks about new dangers a German victory in the east would bring to the peoples of Asia Minor. He incited the Turkish nation to action by using their democratic and constitutional rights. If they did not succeed in such a struggle, he foresaw that the already established political slavery would be doubly entrenched with an economic slavery too.⁷

Two and a half years later, at the first Congress of the TKP, various speakers analysed Turkey's situation after the defeat in War.⁸ One delegate (Ahmet Cevat Emre) accused the last Sultans for acting as accomplices of imperialist powers solely for egoistic motives. After blaming Abdulhamid II, the speaker claimed that Sultan Reşad's pacifism and constitutionalism were also false. He reminded the audience that the Sultan was excited during the defence of Dardanelles and wrote imperialistic verses in praise of Ottoman militarism. He became a tool of the Young Turk government for its Holy War and Islamic Unification policies and signed treaties surrendering important parts of the country to the enemy.

Another delegate (Hilmi oğlu Hakkı) in his presentation on the question of Colonialism, drew attention to Karl Marx's pro-Turkish attitude against Czarist Russia during the Crimean War, and said that Russian Soviet State of today as the real inheritor of Marx's legacy, protects Turkish peasantry against European imperialists.

The delegate who introduced the discussion on the Nationalities question (Nazmi), spoke about the agitation by the Turkish, British and Russian governments of the poor masses during the war. The Dashnak Armenians incited to rebellion by the Russian and British governments were pitilessly punished by the Unionist Turkish government serving German policy, through deportation and massacre. Greeks agitated by the British and their own priests resorted to terror against innocent Turkish people. Again the Young Turkish government retaliated. Millions of poor people suffered and died as a result of imperialistic and chauvinistic interests of great robbers. The only viable solution is to bring down the bourgeois power, break their class dictatorship and to establish a social revolution and independent Soviet government in Turkey.

A similar, but more general hope was already voiced by a radical journalist (Zekeriya Serel) two years ago in an article in Zaman (22 August 1918) where he claimed that European peace could only be established through the inevitable victory of socialism all over the world.⁹

It may be of some interest here, to note the Union and Progress government's attempt at participation in the International Socialist Congress of Stockholm in 1917. The Turkish government sent delegates of "official" socialists, ostensibly representing a native Socialist Party which was in fact especially created for the purpose. However, the Turkish delegates were not accepted by the Mandates Commission,¹⁰ presumably upon the protest of the Armenians.¹¹ A historian of the relations between the Turks and the Jews writes that two delegations were sent to Stockholm (one in May and one in August?), the first was composed of Nissim Masliyah (a member of the Ottoman Parliament), Dr. Âkil Muhtar Özden and Professor Hüseyinzade Ali Turan, in the second Nissim Masliyah again took part, but this time he was accompanied by Salâh Cimcoz.¹² Soviet historian A. Shnurov says of the Union and Progress government which had created in those years many a nationalist (& loyal) workers' organisation, that it also attempted to form a socialist party. "A bourgeois-police 'Socialist' party was founded in which capitalists, lawyers, even generals were members. In the year 1917, this 'Socialist' bourgeoisie and their guards wanted to participate to the International Socialist Congress in Stockholm, as the Turkish Socialist Party. The grand vizier Talât Paşa even ordered the Directorate of Security to prepare for this occasion a special rubber stamp inscribed as Turkish Socialist Party."¹³

The Turkish government did not give up such attempts after this failure; but send a representative to the Socialist International's Berne Congress (who also was not admitted) in February 1919, to secure the peace treaties under negotiation to comply with socialist ideals. Yet, "Kara Schemsi, in the name of the Turks residing in Switzerland, Germany and Austria-Hungary" distributed to the participants a printed brochure: Le proletariat turc au Congress socialiste International de Berne 1919. (14) We know that the author who used this nome de plume was a young Turkish diplomat, named Reşid Saffet Atabinen. He equates the poor in Turkey with the proletariat and claims that this is "perhaps the world's most proletarian country." In the booklet he shrinks from the responsibility for the Armenian massacre on Turkish nation's behalf, claiming that it was the Unionist mercenaries and the Kurdish hordes who killed them. Further, he draws notice to the fact that Anatolian Turks were forcibly conscripted into the army and two million Turks died as a result of the war. That the author might have been acting in his own, can also be given the benefit of doubt.

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Towards the end of the First World War, after the October Revolution, the Ottoman army started an invasion campaign to the north shores of the Caspian Sea and towards Iran and Turkestan. A small group of Turkish revolutionaries, composed of refugee intellectuals and prisoners of war from Turkey as well as some local Tartars organised as "Moslem Socialists" in Moscow, vehemently protested against this Pan-Turanian offensive adventure. Mustafa Suphi, speaking at the First Congress of the Comintern in March 1919, proudly told his listeners how they opposed the Turkish imperialism in the name of revolution and humanity. In the same speech, he relates an example for the progressivist attitude of Turkish youth intelligentsia. In the University of Istanbul during the war years there were a number of German professors who wanted the university to nominate Kaiser Wilhelm II for Nobel peace prize. Thereupon the students rebelled against their teachers' pressures and proposed instead, Lenin's candidacy for the prize. (This news was also reported in Mustafa Suphi's Turkish language newspaper Yeni Dünya.)¹⁵

Not all Turkish socialists approached the peace issue in such terms. The so-called Turkish Socialist Party was pro-British and cherished hopes for England's protection. The Social Democrats were pro-American. Their leader (Dr. Hasan Riza) declared in the Imperial Council which convened on 26th May 1919, that they favoured the peace principles proposed by the humanitarian President Woodrow Wilson. Of course, both the Socialist and the Social Democratic parties opposed the Anatolian resistance. These tendencies of the Turkish socialists who adhered to the Second International were severely criticised by the more orthodox Marxists.¹⁶

During the Turco-Greek War, which is also called the Turkish Liberation Struggle, besides the underground TKP, there were certain leftist movements who tried to compromise socialism with Islam. The settlement these people had in their minds for the long run was an Islamic peace, which was peace in the sense of Pax Romana. They strongly supported the liberation war. For instance, we read in the Green Army Instructions, the following: (article 31) "The Green Army is an organization for the happiness of humanity. In its eyes to shed blood, to widow the women, to leave the children helpless is the greatest evil of the world. Yet, as it is imperative to destroy the present organization in order to save the people from militarism, from their suffering under politicians, from poverty, from the abuses of capitalism, we are lamentably obliged to continue with war until the realisation of our objectives."¹⁷

ly created

The "official" TKP which succeeded this organisation, adopted an ideological position of national struggle, claiming that the rich and the poor could unite in a common war against capitalism if its evils came from abroad and did not emanate internally.¹⁸

The illegal TKP also opted for postponing pacifism until the final victory. In their earliest statutes they declared that (article 7) "The Turkish Bolshevists refuse war and militarism and all the inequalities and injustices deriving from them. They deem struggle and war legitimate only until the destruction of all militarism and imperialism." In their later programme, they also demanded the organisation of revolutionary red armies for the defence of working and farming classes, with the same justification.¹⁹

On the eve of TKP's second congress in August 1922 at Ankara, the Turkish communists supported the Soviet persecution of the SR party leaders in Russia, remembering that the temporary government which they constituted after the February Revolution of 1917, kept up with the war waged against Turkey to seize the Straits and some eastern provinces.²⁰

A representative of the Union of Turkish Communist Youth, Ismail Hakkı, contributed from Istanbul an article entitled "The duty of the Turkish youth in the Red Youth Week" to the Bulgarian Communist Party's Turkish newspaper Ziya on 16th August 1922. After denouncing war with strong words (human butcheries in the fronts, illegitimate war gains, capitalistic exploitation of the economic crises etc.), he calls for the proletarian dictatorship arguing that "the salvation of a nation from slavery and poverty cannot be brought about with the destruction of her external enemies -it is an impossible task to accomplish- but through her protection against her internal enemies, the double-faced savages who kill her."²¹

The two groups, one in Ankara and one in Istanbul, composing the TKP, separately made declarations of support to the Kemalists fighting the Greek invaders and appealed to both sides in war, asking the Greek communists to surrender to the Turks and the Turks to behave humanely towards them. (See "Mazhar"s speech in the 4th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in June 1922.²² "Mazhar" was a pseudonym of Dr.Şefik Hüsnü Değmer who represented the Istanbul communists. The Greek delegate too gave a speech in Turkish at the same congress. Also see the "Appeals" to the Turkish and

Greek armies, published in Yeni Hayat, organ of the People's Communist Party of Turkey, as the Ankara group was known under this name.²³) Yet the Turkish Communist support for Mustafa Kemal was cautious and conditional. They feared that he could at any moment switch to a "treacherous" foreign policy and compromise with the Entente states.²⁴ One ideologue exclaimed that in the pages of Aydinlik, the intellectual Turkish communist monthly journal:²⁵

"The political independence for which the Anatolian soldiers sacrificed their blood can only be established on an economic basis. ... If Turkey cannot be rendered into an agricultural country, a country of production, then all the blood shed in the past and will be shed in the future will be a sin and a crime of murder against the nation and the humanity at large."

TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TÜSTAN TARİH ARAŞTIRMALARI



It must be acknowledged that the above mentioned Unionist delegates were really from the left wing of their party. According to a news item in the London Times of April 11, 1923, one of them, Salâh Cimcoz contested in the general elections for the new Ankara Grand National Assembly as a "socialist candidate."

¹³ "Kemalist Devrim ve Türkiye Proletaryası," translated into Turkish by Güneş Bozkaya in Türkiye'de Kapitalistleşme ve Sınıf Kavgaları (Istanbul: Ant Yay., 1970), p. 41.

¹⁴ TSA, p. 78, fn. 113.

¹⁵ TSA, pp. 199-202.

¹⁶ TSA, p. 86, fn. 129 and Eski Sol..., p. 124.

¹⁷ TSA, p. 396.

¹⁸ TSA, p. 164.

¹⁹ TSA, pp. 387 and 413.

²⁰ TSA, p. 505.

²¹ Eski Sol..., pp. 276-78.

²² Eski Sol..., p. 268.

²³ TSA, pp. 268-69.

²⁴ TSA, pp. 269-70, 280-81 and 287, fn. 259.

²⁵ TSA p. 337: Vedat Nedim Tör in issue Nr. 17 (August 1923).