

COMMUNIST PARTY OF TURKEY – AN INSTRUMENT OF ‘SOVIET EASTERN POLICY’?, by Bülent Gökay

Introduction

When the Ottoman Empire, the ‘sick man of Europe’, officially came to an end at the end of the First World War in October 1918, the chances of survival for a sovereign Turkey seemed to be very remote. British Empire, as the leading Allied power imposed a settlement on the lands of the Ottoman Empire, which detached a substantial part of Ottoman territory, severely limited national sovereignty and preserved the pre-war capitulatory regime of extra-territorial rights for Western powers. This period witnessed the birth and swift growth of a Turkish resistance movement in Anatolia, which found major international support from the young Bolshevik state. Both Turkish nationalists and Russian Bolsheviks found themselves threatened by the western imperial powers. Common struggle against the western imperial powers threatening both sides led to a mutually advantageous collusion between Moscow and Ankara. In the encouraging atmosphere of friendship between the Bolsheviks and Turkish national movement, left-wing activities gained momentum with the emergence of a number of left-socialist organisations in Turkey. The most important socialist movement was the Communist Party of Turkey organised and led by Mustafa Suphi who was in Russia since the beginning of the First World War, 1914.¹

The 1920s were the heyday of anti-imperialist struggle for the Bolsheviks. The relationship between anti-imperialist nationalist movements and communism was articulated and generally supported by Moscow. In 1919, the Communist International (*Komintern*) was established in Moscow to coordinate the activities of the foreign communist parties around the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Lenin felt that the revolutionary environment of the post-war chaos now called for an entirely new international communist organisation that would foster working class solidarity and world revolution against the capitalist rulers of the West. This body subordinated all foreign communist parties to Moscow by virtue of the 21 conditions, which were formulated in 1920. Communists were called upon to make propaganda within their own countries’ armed forces, make special efforts to win peasant support, achieve emancipation of oppressed nationalities and colonial peoples. Communist parties were required to structure their organisations on the principle of “democratic centralism”, and to support unreservedly the interests of the Soviet Union. For better or worse, the communist parties thus emerged in foreign lands as the ideological allies and foreign policy instruments of the Soviet Union. Komintern, the Third International, in a radical departure from the precedents set by both the First and Second Internationals, was no longer to be a series of national parties, but more like a single communist party with branches in different countries. Between congresses, the highest authority was to be the Executive Committee, which would have powers parallel to and superseding the powers of the Central Committees of the individual parties. It was to be a directive centre of the world revolution.

At first, the Komintern was overwhelmingly a westward-looking organisation. A considerable number of recruits came in from Western countries and strengthened the belief that world revolution was quickly approaching. The Bolsheviks were convinced that the proletarian revolution was afoot all over Europe and sweeping everything before it. But by the fall of that year, the Soviet leaders had begun to fear that revolution in the West might not be imminent after all. The failures in Germany and Hungary, and the solidification of a belt of anti-communist regimes between the Soviet Union and the defeated Central Powers caused them to reconsider. All this did not lead them to abandon the idea of the coming revolution in

¹ B. Gökay, *A Clash of Empires*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1997, pp. 104-106.

the West, but it certainly moved them to consider the revolutionary potential which the East could offer.

“One of the chief causes hampering the revolutionary working-class movement in the developed capitalist countries”, Lenin said, “is the fact that because of their colonial possessions and the super-profits gained by finance capital”.² The Bolshevik leadership decided that the capitalist world must be undermined by the loss of its colonies before communism could succeed in the West. Revolution in the East and the destruction of the system of imperial control might have to precede revolution in the West. This was considered the key aspect of the revolutionary struggle because “[...] about 70 percent of the world population belong to the oppressed nations, which are either in a state of direct colonial dependence or are semi-colonies, as, for example, Persia, Turkey and China, ...”³ At the Komintern's Second Congress in July 1920, Lenin officially introduced the new eastern orientation, the so-called "Soviet Eastern Policy". Although in foreign affairs, Soviet orientation was never wholly eastern or wholly western, after 1920 there was an increasing interest in the eastern revolutionary approach and a clear shift towards an eastern political orientation.

Elements of the “Soviet Eastern Policy”

As part of the Komintern strategy, the pro-Soviet communists were professing solidarity with the anti-imperialist national liberation movements in the East. To the Bolsheviks, the October Revolution had built a bridge between the “enlightened” West and the “enslaved” East. The Soviet leadership appealed to colonial peoples at the Komintern-sponsored Congress of Peoples of the East in Baku, Azerbaijan, in September 1920.⁴ The Komintern set up a Council of Propaganda and Actions of the Peoples of the East in Baku. All these attempts marked a turning point by reviving the suspicions of Muslims against the Soviet Union, which the Soviet government had been taking such pains to eradicate. The Bolsheviks tried to build on the success of these initial steps, especially the Baku Congress, by advocating a united front between communists and eastern nationalists against western imperialism. As a result, many links were established with the Muslim peoples of the East, and many Asian revolutionaries were trained in the Soviet Union with profound consequences for the West.

In the years following 1920, the Bolsheviks tried to strengthen this bridge by advocating a united front between communists and eastern nationalists against western imperialism. In this, the Soviet government applied a multi-faceted strategy of simultaneous alternative policies, which at the same time combined "peaceful co-existence" and "fraternal aid" to communist parties and movements, with collaboration with and assistance to reactionary nationalist governments who were suppressing those same parties and movements.

This flexible strategy made it possible for the USSR to infiltrate the target countries, to further its "cause" and its influence. This flexibility permitted the use of all available means – communist parties, international organisations, and even sometimes reactionary parties. In the end, the decisive factor for the USSR was not necessarily the success of a particular communist party, but rather to implement the foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union. World communism remained the publicly stated, long-range maximum goal, always second in priority to the immediate goal of the state interests of the Soviet Union.

² “Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International”, V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol.31, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.193.

³ “Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Question, *ibid.*, pp.240-241.

⁴ Stephen White, ‘Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920’, *Slavic Review*, XXXIII, 3 (1974), pp. 492-514.

Starting from the early 1920s, the Bolshevik Politburo developed several activities in a number of countries in the East. There were basically three players in each case. Main player was the Bolshevik Politburo in Moscow. It naturally knew all about different spheres of Soviet foreign policy activities, because it planned and implemented them. Second player was the bourgeois-nationalist government of the foreign country, naturally aware of its own side in the foreign relations, but was not fully aware of the ties between the Kremlin and the local communists. The third actor was the local communist party, whose members, even its leaders, knew almost nothing of what was going on between Moscow and their country's bourgeois-nationalist government. Being kept in dark seriously handicapped them. Moscow could negotiate with a bourgeois-nationalist government and at the same time tell the local communist party what to do. A bourgeois-nationalist government could deal freely with Moscow and at the same time crack down on the local communist party.

Caught in the middle, the party was at one and the same time unable to oppose Moscow's policies, and to resist effectively the reprisals of the bourgeois-nationalist government. This policy would frustrate the Komintern until the end of its days. An early example to this frustration was the "Black Sea affair" in Turkey in the late 1920. This turned out to be typical for the whole history of the Komintern in the East.

"Soviet Eastern Policy" and Turkey

In line with the new eastern orientation, in the context of the early 1920s international relations, the Soviet government found an area of common interest with the nationalist government of Turkey. Force of circumstance impelled Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey to arrive at a rapprochement. The two were drawn together by mutual fear as a result of the plans and activities of the Western powers in the region. But it was not all plain sailing.

At one level one can explain this in old-fashioned power political terms. Soviet Russia was heir to imperial Russia and certainly had no intention of abandoning the Caucasus to other powers whether Western or Eastern. When Bekir Sami, Turkish envoy, came to Moscow in July 1920, he was confronted with a proposal from Chicherin that Turkey relinquish Van, Bitlis and Mus to Armenia and engage in an exchange of populations so as to restore the Armenian population to those territories. Bekir Sami replied that Turkey would not surrender an inch of territory. Curiously, this did not prevent Lenin from receiving Bekir Sami in person, and did not stop the signing of the Draft Treaty of Friendship on 24 August. Later the Soviet-Turkish Treaty was signed, against the wishes of Chicherin, on 16 March 1921. In its preamble, it committed both countries to the "struggle against imperialism". This was a reflection of Moscow's position that a Turkish alliance against British imperialism was far more important than sparing the susceptibilities of a few Armenians and Georgians. Thus began the long era of Soviet-Turkish friendship, confirmed by the December 1925 treaty. It would appear completely unaffected by the ups and downs of Turkish government's relations with its indigenous communists.

Aid to or an alliance with a local government or a "bourgeois" national movement aimed against "imperialists" always posed the danger that the non-communist "client" might turn against the local communists. There was no real escape from this dilemma. The third party, *Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, *TKP* [the Communist Party of Turkey], in our case, although politically and financially supported by Moscow all through, was a loser even at its birth. This dilemma would torment the relations between Moscow and the Turkish communists till the end of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Turkey.

Marxist ideas began to penetrate Turkey towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the First World War many Turkish socialists were in Germany and became close to the Spartacus League. Another group of Turkish socialists was in Russia and became witnesses to the Russian Revolution.

TKP, the Communist Party of Turkey, one of the oldest political parties in Turkey and among the oldest communist parties in the Middle East, was founded in September 1920 in Baku. The proximity of the Russian Revolution had led to a Leninist organisation in Turkey before most other countries. Turkish communists played an active part in Komintern affairs. Sefik Husnu, one of the leaders of the party, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Komintern until 1936.

In September 1920, soon after its foundation, the leadership of the Communist Party of Turkey decided to shift the centre of its activities to Turkey. In late 1920, Mustafa Subhi and the other leading members of the party left Baku, and set out for Anatolia. They went quite openly to their country. It was sheer bad timing! The group could not proceed further than Trabzon. On 28 January 1921, Mustafa Subhi and 15 other leading communists were put in a boat, and sent back to Batum. 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. It was a classical, Ottoman-style elimination.⁵

The available documents confirm that the Ankara government had a substantial role in this incident. It is clear that K. Karabekir, one of the most prominent nationalist army commanders, and Hamit Bey, a very important local representative of the Ankara government, put the plan together. It is also clear in the documents that Mustafa Kemal asked them to stop the group of communists and confirmed the “plan” prepared in Trabzon. It is, however, still a mystery whether the “plan” included “murder”, or it was improvised on the spot.⁶

When the news arrived in Moscow, the Soviet Politburo forwarded an official statement to inform the members of the Soviet communist party. The central theme of the statement was the “[...] dangers of left-wing and adventurist initiatives”. Moscow, apparently, did not share the optimism and the decision of the Turkish communists.⁷

This incident did not make a serious impact upon the Turkish-Soviet relations. It was noted and put aside by both sides in a businessman like fashion. The experience is, however, significant and rich in lessons. The murder of the leading Turkish communists in the early days of 1921 represents the first example of the failure of a peculiar Soviet dilemma in the East: to support the anti-communist leadership of a national liberation movement, and at the same time to sponsor and organise local communist groups against the nationalist leadership of the country. When the Kemalist leadership openly started to root out all communist activities in Turkey, protests were made at world communist gatherings, but it did not hinder the good diplomatic and economic relations between Moscow and Ankara. The Soviet government chose to continue its official policy of co-operation with Ankara, regardless of the fate of the local communists loyal to Moscow. For the first time, the interests of Soviet foreign policy actually involved the existence of a communist party.⁸

During the 1920s, the communists and socialists were weak and were denied any part in the new Turkey. Turkish government, under Mustafa Kemal, pursued a cat and mouse policy towards local communists. Sometimes they were tolerated, sometimes repressed.

⁵ Mete Tuncay, *Turkiye’de Sol Akimlar*, Ankara, 1967, pp. 231-3.

⁶ B. Gokay, “The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29/2, 1993, pp.220-235.

⁷ Internal Party Report, RCP(B), 20 February 1921, Moscow, TsPA, Fond:5, Op.:2, D.:2. (On 31 January 1951, however, *Pravda* vociferously attacked the murder of M. Subhi, “[...] the true son of the Turkish people”.)

⁸ The tragic sacrifice of the local communists to the interests of the Soviet foreign policy repeated itself on a much larger scale six years later in China. Convinced that China was entering its bourgeois-democratic revolution, Stalin favoured proletarian participation in a national bloc including peasants and bourgeoisie and urged the communists to enter this bloc, Kuomintang. But during his northward expedition in 1926-27, Chiang, the nationalist leader in China, slaughtered thousands of communists in Shanghai, expelled Soviet advisors, and soon ruled much of China. SUGGESTION TO CUT

Usually they were repressed. Mustafa Kemal banned the party in 1925, and after that the Communist Party of Turkey was forced into illegality during most of its history and faced a large number of mass-detentions.

The activities of these early communists could hardly aim at revolution. The Bolshevik leadership in Moscow had no illusion about it.⁹ Sultan-Galiev, one of the top Muslim communists in the Soviet hierarchy, openly acknowledged in 1920 that: “Turkish communists consist of a group of underground workers, former Turkish prisoners of war in Russia. This group is not particularly large, but works very intensely.” Another leading Bolshevik, the Soviet expert on Turkey, Pavlowitch said in 1921: “[...] the Turkish people, due to historical reasons of adherence to religion, cannot at this moment accept the communist programme.”¹⁰

The Sixth Komintern Congress, held in 1928, was the scene of a dispute between the Turkish delegate, who stated that Mustafa Kemal had gone over completely to the camp of the counter-revolution, and Otto Kuusinen, one of the top officials in the Komintern apparatus, who said in his draft theses that Kemal’s struggle against imperialism was still a progressive factor. Like the Turkish question Kuusinen’s official theses were attacked by the Persian delegate, Sultan Zade, who said that Riza Shah was not a representative of “nationalism and progress” as Kuusinen claimed, but the representative of the “reactionary forces in Persia”. Neither of these complaints had much effect. The fundamental strategic requirement – to support national movement against Western imperialism, whatever their domestic character, was upheld throughout the whole period of the Komintern’s existence, and later in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Soviet leaders, however, continued to support Turkish communists almost until the end of the Soviet Union, financially and politically. At the same time they knew, at least until after 1960, that there was no chance of a communist revolution, even a significant left-wing presence, in Turkey. The Soviet leaders knew that conditions were not ripe for a true revolution, probably never would be. They were also careful not to provoke a British counter move, or sacrifice good relations with the nationalist government in Ankara. That was a kind of sensitive balancing acts all through.

The Communist Party of Turkey was one of the most loyal to Moscow. All through the Turkish communists closely followed Moscow’s lead. It was always closely controlled by elements responsive to Moscow. The party did not express any sign of independence to make its own decisions and judgements. It did not attempt to formulate its own strategy and tactics based on the conditions of Turkish state and society. To start with, it had very little contact with the Turkish people. It was brought together by scattered group of self-converted communists. The party’s small number of members was almost entirely middle class. The party attracted many Turkish intellectuals, among them Nazim Hikmet, the best-known poet of Turkey. Its leadership was comprised of de-classed intellectuals with university level education. The Communist Party of Turkey’s mind was the mind of the Western-educated Turkish middle class intellectuals.

A clear example to this is the fact that ethnic problems in Turkey were ignored by both the local communists and the Soviet government. The 1925 Kurdish revolt, led by Sheikh Said, was described as a “reactionary feudal movement”. Even though its mobilisation, propaganda and symbols created the impression that it was a religious rebellion, Sheikh Said revolt was essentially for Kurdish national independence. It took for the Turkish

⁹ From Zinoviev to Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and Bukharin, 14 November 192; Moscow, TsPA, Fond:5, Op.:3, D.:141.

¹⁰ Report on the communist movement in Turkey, from Pavlowitch to Lenin, for the year 1921, Moscow, TsPA, Fond:5, Op.:3, D.:213. See also Pavlowitch, “Greek-Turkish Communists”, *Kommunisticheski Internatsional*, No.17, pp.4427-8.

government a full-scale operation to put it down. Tens of thousands of Kurdish people were killed and driven into exile. More Kurdish uprisings happened in the following years. In 1930, the Soviet government assisted official regime in Turkey in the suppression of another Kurdish rebellion by allowing Turkish troops to use Soviet railways and by closing their borders to Kurdish refugees.

During the Second World War, the Communist Party of Turkey carried out propaganda activities against the war and fascism. The party plenum in 1943 adopted a document entitled “Struggle Front Against Fascism and Profiteering”.¹¹ After the war communist activities were resumed in Turkey. The party continued to act although its activities were seriously suppressed. With the beginning of the Cold War the reactionary trend in Turkish politics reached its peak. One of the first undertakings of the centre-right *Demokrat Parti* government was to deploy 5000 Turkish soldiers to the Korean War to fight communism. It is the period in which subservience to the US became the law of the land and Anatolia became the site of American military bases. Turkey became a satellite of the American Cold War empire. During this period there was a big mass-detention of the party members in the years 1951 and 1952. Almost all key members of the party were arrested, tortured and sentenced to heavy terms of imprisonment. The effect of this turned out to be fatal for the party’s organisation in Turkey in the 1950s. After 1953 the activities of the party were mainly limited to the activities conducted from abroad.

A New Opening, 1960s

The serious social, economic and political crisis that occurred under the centre-right regime of the 1950s led to a *coup d’etat* on 27 May 1960. This and the adoption in 1961 of a more democratic and liberal constitution marked the beginning of a new period in the country. For the first time in decades suppressed ideological and political trends were permitted to take part in the political life of the country. Workers in Turkey acquired for the first time the right to form trade unions as well as the right to strike, and a new period was opened for general democratic rights with the coming of relative democratisation in both political and social life.

While certain articles in the Turkish Penal Code continued to forbid an openly communist party, the new constitution specifically allowed for the creation of a socialist party. In February 1961, some leaders of the Istanbul trade unions took the opportunity to establish a legal socialist party, the Workers Party of Turkey [*Türkiye İşçi Partisi, TIP*]. In this way, for the first time since the 1920s, a legal left-wing movement appeared that encompassed a variety of leftist, radical left, social-democratic, trade unionist and Marxist elements. This party differed from earlier illegal socialist parties in that it was formed not by intellectuals but by elected representatives of the workers. For the first time in Turkish history proletarian politics was now on the agenda.

The emergence of the TIP as a unitarian socialist party was partly due to the situation in the international workers’ movement at the time of its creation. The official Soviet attitude toward foreign communist parties had undergone a striking change after the death of Stalin in 1953. The new Soviet leadership started to refrain from issuing direct public orders to foreign communist parties. On the other hand, Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization had not yet divided world communism, and the Cuban and Algerian revolutions were still in their “heroic” stages. Interesting enough, this was the time when the socialist and communist ideas started to find new channels in Turkey. The legal working class party, TIP, was the result of this new culture. TIP contained a panorama of ideas, attitudes, and priorities. It was socialist and pro-Soviet in a general sense.

¹¹ M. S. Guzel, ‘Capital and Labor During World War II’, in D. Quataert and E. Zürcher, *Workers and Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839-1950*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1995, p.127.

The platform of the TIP called for the redistribution of land, nationalisation of industry and financial institutions, the exclusion of foreign capital, and urged closer cooperation with the Soviet bloc countries. At first, the legal socialist party attracted the support of only some trade union leaders and leftist intellectuals. In its first year of existence, the party did very little as its leaders lacked experience and had no clear-cut political views. Only in February 1962, with the election of a new leadership under the prominent lawyer Mehmet Ali Aybar, did the party become more active. In addition to trade unionists, the new leadership now included lawyers, academics, publicists and teachers. In 1964, the First Congress of the TIP approved the party programme, which was clearly pro-Soviet and based on non-capitalist path of development.

In the October 1965 general parliamentary elections, the party won approximately 3 percent of the total votes, and gained 15 seats in the Parliament, by taking advantage of the more democratic election system designed with the 1960 coup. Encouraged by their success, the party leadership decided to shift the general direction of the party from the struggle for democratic transformation to the attainment of open socialist goals, and thus the promotion of the non-capitalist path was replaced by the call for the struggle for socialism.

The events in Czechoslovakia during August 1968 had a great effect on the members of the TIP. The Soviet invasion led to fierce debates within the party and then to an internal crisis. Aybar protested against the occupation of Czechoslovakia and made comments highly critical of the Soviet Union. He argued that Turkish socialists should not limit themselves to the study of Marx and Lenin, but acquired a wider grasp of socialism by reading Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg. The Third Congress of the party, in November 1968, was dominated by this issue, and it became apparent that three different factions did exist within the communist/socialist movement of Turkey: one was Aybar's group, the most powerful and influential at that time, with a critical view of Soviet policies in Czechoslovakia; a second group led by two prominent socialist, Behice Boran and Sadun Aren, who were defending Soviet policies and criticizing Aybar's position severely; a third group led by Mihri Belli, calling itself the Proletarian Revolutionaries, supported ideas of national democratic revolution – an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement.

The Communist Party of Turkey supported the legal socialist platform represented by the TIP unconditionally, and many leading members of the Communist Party took an active part in the organisation of the legal socialist party. The majority of the leaders and key members of the TIP were either members of the TKP or sympathisers of the party line, and the radio of the TKP, based in East Berlin, consistently supported the activities and policies of the TIP. Like the calls by the leaders of the TIP, TKP took the line that to be truly democratic Turkey should detach itself from NATO and join the group of non-aligned states led by Tito and Nehru. Different from the TIP, on Czechoslovakia and other international issues, the TKP consistently supported Moscow. In August 1963, the TKP hailed the nuclear-test-ban treaty as victory for the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence, and castigated the Chinese Communist Party for seeking to provoke war.

During the 1960s, the anti-imperialist youth movement achieved the mass character around anti-American and anti-NATO sentiments. Massive anti-imperialist demonstrations against the US Sixth Fleet practically banned that fleet from Turkish waters. That ban was effective for over 10 years. It was only after the military coup of September 1980 that the American war-ships dared to enter Turkish ports.

The dramatic student politics of 1968 made a great impact on Turkish left. As soon as the word reached them of the Sorbonne takeover, in Istanbul students began to occupy their campuses too. There was one important difference of course. In the West, May 1968 signified the beginning of something consciously unorthodox, revolutionary, but not communist. In Turkey, by contrast, there was no such sense of unorthodoxy, nor the feeling of a break with

Stalinism. There was a profound sense of continuity and the revolutionary tradition coming from the 1920s. Many young communists from the TKP played an active role in these movements. It was *Fikir Kulupleri* (Idea Clubs) the leading student organisation in the universities to organise the protest movements, and among the leaders of the *Fikir Kulupleri* there were prominent communists. When in June 1968 the arrival of the Sixth Fleet of the US Navy was planning to visit Istanbul harbour, massive student protests took place in Istanbul. Thousands of students attacked soldiers and officers of the Sixth Fleet, a number of American soldiers were thrown to the sea. This action became the symbol of the anti-imperialist spirit and of '1968' in Turkey.

1973: A Great Leap Forward

After the military coup of 1971, the left in Turkey was strongly suppressed, with the only legal socialist party, the TIP, banned from July 1971. Ideologically and politically, there were two main tendencies among the left after 1971: the traditional pro-Soviet left tendency, led by the TKP, that aimed at organising among the working class and trade union movement, and followed the line of the official Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); and the revolutionary populist tendency, which was organised mainly among the university students, youth and petty bourgeois layers of towns and provinces. The political line of this second tendency was reflected in Maoism and urban guerrilla activism.

The suppression of the legal party, the TIP, and other left-wing organizations provided a new and heightened mission to the members of the TKP, as many leading left-wing organisers were either killed or put in prison, or forced to escape abroad – Mahir Cayan and his comrades were killed in Kizildere; Denis Gezmis, Yusuf Aslan and Huseyin Inan were sentenced to death and hanged; Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, the leader of the Maoist TKP-ML (Communist Party of Turkey/ Marxist-Leninist) was killed in Diyarbakir prison under torture; the leading cadre of another important Maoist group, *Proleter Devrimci Aydinlik* (proletarian Revolutionary Enlightenment), were put in prison for long terms; and all leading members of the TIP were sentenced and put in prison; and many other left-wing activists had to leave Turkey.

In this new atmosphere, the first practical steps taken to fill the gaps created by the oppression were the emergence of a new type of communist youth movement. *Sosyalist Genclik Orgutu* (Socialist Youth Association) started to organise small illegal cells called '*Egitim Gruplari*' (Education Groups), after similar cells that had existed in Lenin's Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution. The *Egitim Gruplari* thus offered the first steps towards the popular reorganisation of the TKP in the early 1970s.

At a meeting in 1973 the Politburo of the Communist Party of Turkey decided, along with some cadres from the 1968 youth movement, to a new attempt at a breakthrough in Turkey. A new programme was drafted, a Central Committee publication, *Atilim* (Progress), was established, a new and more effective radio station, *TKP'nin Sesi* (Voice of the Communist Party of Turkey) broadcasting started from Leipzig. All this accounted to 'a great leap forward' for the TKP, and even without legal status it enjoyed a rapid and improving popularity all around the country. As a result, the Communist Party of Turkey for the first time became an effective political force in Turkey.

In 1977, the party held a conference in Moscow, its biggest organisational gathering since its 4th congress in 1932. In the second half of the 1970s, the entire balance of influence within the Turkish left was shifted when the party secured almost all key posts within the trade union movement, professional organisations and other legal mass organisations. There also were many legal youth, teacher, technical, apprentice and women's organisations, with hundreds of thousands of members, that were founded directly under the party's control. Added to this, of course, were thousands of secret party cells composed of workers in

factories all over Turkey. Between 1970 and 1980, the growth in the working class movement was unprecedented and socialist ideas were rapidly spreading among workers. Under the direction of the TKP, **DISK** (Revolutionary Confederation of Labour Unions) for the first time organised a mass rally in 1976 to celebrate May Day. The May Day celebrations had been prohibited for the past 50 years, but in 1976 at least 200,000 people joined the rally in Istanbul and openly shouted the name of the illegal communist party – ‘TKP’ye *Ozgurluk*’ (Freedom to the TKP).

Following its successful May Day celebration in 1976, DISK organised a bigger May Day demonstration in the following year, to be held in Taksim Square in Istanbul. By the time the DISK General Chairman, Kemal Turkler, delivered his May Day speech, all the roads leading to Taksim were still full of people marching all day trying to reach the Taksim square. The DISK chairman was about to finish his speech when snipers on surrounding buildings started firing at the crowd. First there was stillness, and then a deadly pandemonium broke out and the crowd of almost 1 million fled in panic. Altogether 36 people died, and hundreds were wounded. **While some that** the incident was a provocation by right-wing militants, carried under the direction of the CIA-controlled Turkish contra-guerrillas, the police and the right-wing press advanced the idea that the incident had been sparked by extreme leftists.

The military coup of 1980 and the end of the party

The 1980s began with a shock not only for the communists, but also for the wider left, liberal and social-democratic constituency in Turkey. The Constitution and Parliament were abolished. All political parties, trade unions and other professional and youth organisations were closed, leading members and activists **arrested**. Some 30,000 people were reported **arrested** in the first few weeks after the coup. Over 50,000 people were forced to migrate to European countries as political immigrants. 700 death sentences were demanded, 480 of them sentenced to death, 216 were suspended by the parliament, 48 were hanged.

After the military coup on 12 September 1980, an extensive campaign of persecutions and arrests was launched against all democratic movements, and particularly the TKP, with thousands of its members arrested or sentenced to prison on the basis of articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish Penal Code, taken directly from the legislation of fascist Italy. The heavy oppression that followed the military coup pushed all communist and left-wing activities under ground, again. Such harsh conditions and illegality also encouraged divisions among the communists: even among the pro-Soviet left, there were at least three illegal communist parties and many more fractions within each, all that spent most of their energy fighting one another. All this infighting drew the left further and further away from reality, creating an introverted world of crippled politics.

More than any internal debate, it was Gorbachev and perestroika during this period that eventually affected developments within the TKP. The ‘new political thinking’, Gorbachev’s foreign policy counterpart to domestic perestroika, was radically different from previous Soviet foreign policy. In many respects, the ‘new political thinking’ had direct implications for the world communist movement because it insisted that military means alone would not achieve security, and therefore a wide range of political means had to be considered, including political cooperation with other left-wing and even social-democratic parties and movements, as essential alternatives. In line with the ‘new political thinking’, the TKP and the Workers Party of Turkey (TIP) announced at a press conference in Brussels on 7 October 1987 that they were going to merge under the name of *Turkiye Birlesik Komunist Partisi* (TBKP), United Communist Party of Turkey.

The general secretaries of both parties, Haydar Kutlu and Nihat Sargin, returned from political exile to Turkey on 16 November 1987 in order to legally set up the TBKP. However,

they were arrested immediately upon their arrival and detained until April 1990, leaving the 1988 founding congress of the TBKP to be held abroad. In January 1990, a group of founders applied for legal status of the party. While waiting for a decision from the Constitutional Court of Turkey, a legal congress of the party was held in Ankara, where a decision was accepted to merge with other left socialist parties. A united left party emerged, called *Sosyalist Birlik Partisi*, Socialist Union Party, in line with the similar developments in the Soviet-satellite states of Eastern Europe. On 22 July 1991, the Constitutional Court in Turkey, however, made a decision in affect prohibiting the legal communist party in Turkey.

Conclusion

For most of this period, the TKP was weak and entirely dependent on political and financial support provided by Moscow, and was always controlled elements responsive to Moscow. Its peculiar existence was subject to the priorities of Soviet foreign policy, and leaders of the Turkish party expressed little independence in making their own decisions or judgements to make any influence in the domestic situation of the country. Within Turkey, the communist movement had no significant organic link with the workers and peasants, at least until the second half of the 1970s. Only after the reorganisation campaign of 1973 did the party take significant steps to influence the trade-union movement and the wider left agenda in the country. Even then, the party leadership remained strictly within the boundaries of Soviet foreign policy requirements, frustrating thousands of militants and party activists who were trying to fashion effective responses to the increasingly radical demands of the workers, peasants and students in the country.

For the Soviet Union, a socialist revolution in Turkey was never an option. The Soviet leadership had always approached Turkey as a security concern measured against the dominant role played by the British Empire in the Near and Middle East after the First World War. When the United States replaced the British as the dominant regional superpower and leader of the capitalist world, the Soviet leadership focused all its efforts on counterbalancing the increasingly close links between the United States and Turkey, and the American-sponsored efforts to erect anti-Soviet 'collective security' agreements in the region became a particular concern.

In the course of 74 years of Soviet history, security considerations dominated Soviet behaviour in international affairs, and similarly became the primary dimension of Soviet policy toward Turkey. Thus the Soviet leadership pursued a reasonable, pragmatic and non-ideological policy towards Turkey, and instruments of Soviet policy towards Turkey were those traditionally used by great powers in their relations with a lesser power – economic, technical and military assistance, trade, diplomacy, propaganda, and the use of military force, or at least the threat of it. Of these, economic and technical assistance were particularly important, and from the mid-1960s onwards the Soviet Union became one of Turkey's principal trading partners.

The overall goal of Soviet policy was to increase Soviet influence in Turkey at the expense of the Western powers – mainly the British Empire before the end of the Second World War, and the United States thereafter. When Turkey became a member of the Western alliance system and increasingly dependent on the hegemonic control structures of the US global hegemony, Soviet policy began to look more like a desperate effort to limit the extent of US influence in the country. In this wider framework, direct Soviet influence over the communist movement in Turkey was important, first as a means of diplomatic pressure, and second Turkish communists provided Moscow with vital information on the fast changing situation in the country. The Soviet leadership was using its close control over Turkish party in order to put pressure, when required, on the bourgeois government of Turkey, as well as on

Western capitalist states. That's why some official statements by the Soviet leadership attempted to create the impression that the communist movement in Turkey was a powerful political force, even though in their internal discussions they admitted that the Turkish party was very small and ineffective. In this way, Turkish communists were useful as conduits for Soviet propaganda that duly reported to Moscow on the local political situation.

The Soviet Union was able to influence the communist movement in Turkey primarily through financial aid and propaganda support. This influence was very strong most of the time, which explains why the TKP was extraordinarily loyal to Moscow's policies on almost all key issues. Even after the party started, for the first time, to enjoy mass support among the workers and the youth in the second half of the 1970s, this loyalty to Moscow and Soviet foreign policy requirements stopped the Turkish party from providing more realistic and radical alternatives to the increasingly fragile and desperate political situation in Turkey.

The shifts in the priorities of the Soviet foreign policy and the changing agenda of "Soviet Eastern Policy" closely affected Moscow's interests in the activities of the Turkish communists. Therefore, the support given to and influence exercised on the Communist Party of Turkey provide a good illustration of the fabric of the motivational sources of Soviet behaviour in its foreign relations, particularly in the Third World, with respect to the "Soviet Eastern Policy".

Bibliography