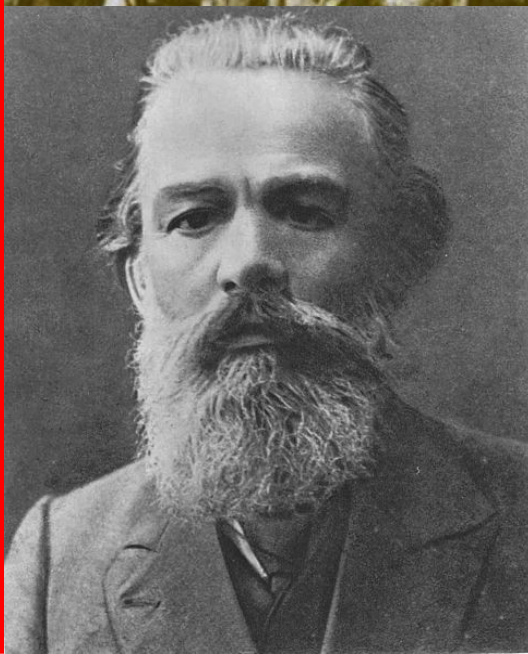




# The Left Wing of the Turkish Communist Party

Part 1: The Socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire

International  
Review



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## Introduction to the 2nd English edition

This introduction was originally written to present a new English edition of our pamphlet on the Left Wing of the Turkish Communist Party (Türkiye Komünist Partisi, TKP), which was to be serialised in the pages of the *International Review*. The first edition of the pamphlet was published in 2008 by the Turkish group Enternasyonalist Komünist Sol (Internationalist Communist Left, EKS), which had already adopted the ICC's basic positions as a statement of principle, and had begun to discuss the ICC's Platform. In 2009, EKS joined the ICC to form our organisation's section in Turkey, publishing *Dünya Devrimi* ("World Revolution").

We initially planned to publish a somewhat extended version of the new Turkish edition, which clarified some aspects of the original pamphlet with further references to original Turkish material. It also added as an appendix (for the first time in both modern Turkish and English), the 1920 founding declaration of the TKP in Ankara. However as work progressed on this new material it became clear that what was originally planned as a brief summary of the socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire was expanding to the point where it was already several chapters long. Work continues on the new chapters dealing with the history of the communist movement in Turkey; in the meantime we have decided to publish directly the already completed work on the Ottoman Empire.

The body of the pamphlet still presents a certain difficulty for the non-Turkish reader, in that it refers to historical events which are common knowledge for any Turkish schoolchild, but are little known or not at all outside Turkey. Rather than weigh down the body of the text with explanations which would be unnecessary for the Turkish reader, we have chosen to add some explanatory notes in the English version, and to give, in this article, a general overview of the historical context which, we hope, will make it easier for the reader to find his way through a complex period.<sup>1</sup>

Our historical overview will itself be divided into two parts: in the first, we will concentrate on the actual events leading up to the creation of the Turkish state, and the formation of the TKP; in the second, we will examine the debates surrounding the theoretical basis of the Comintern's policy towards national movements in the East, in particular as these are expressed in the

adoption of the "Theses on the National Question" at the Comintern's Second Congress.

## The fall of the Ottoman Empire

The Turkish Republic founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the years following World War I was born out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> The Empire (also known as the Sublime Porte) was not a national state, but the result of a series of dynastic conquests, which - at its greatest extent in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century - spread along the North African coast as far as Algiers, across present-day Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon, and much of coastal Saudi Arabia, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; on the European continent, the Ottomans conquered Greece, the Balkans and much of Hungary. Ever since the reign of Selim the Excellent in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Sultan had also assumed the title of Caliph, that is to say the leader of the whole *Ummah*, or community of Islam. Insofar as one can make an analogy with European history, the Ottoman Sultans thus combined the spiritual and temporal attributes of the Roman Emperor and the Pope.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, the Ottoman Empire was coming under growing pressure from the expansionism of modern European capitalist states, leading to its gradual disintegration. Egypt broke away *de facto* after Napoleon invaded in 1798 and was driven out by an alliance of British and local troops; it became a British protectorate in 1882. French troops conquered Algeria in a series of bloody conflicts between 1830 and 1872, while Tunisia was made a French protectorate in 1881. Greece won its independence in 1830, after a war fought with the help of the British, French, and Russians.

This process of disintegration continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1908 Bulgaria declared its independence and Austria-Hungary formalised its annexation of Bosnia; in 1911 Italy invaded Libya, while in 1912 the Ottoman army was badly mauled during the First Balkan War by the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Greeks. Indeed the Sublime Porte's survival was due in part to the rivalries of the European powers, none of which could allow its rivals to profit from the Empire's collapse at their own expense. Thus France

<sup>1</sup> In doing so, we have relied extensively on Andrew Mango's recent biography of Kemal Atatürk, and on EH Carr's history of the Russian Revolution (1950 edition), in particular the chapter in Volume I on "Self-Determination in practice". The French speaking reader can usefully consult the long critical article published in *Programme Communiste* n°100 (December 2009), which, despite its inevitable Bordigist blind spots, contains some useful historical material.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that Turkey as such did not exist for much of the period covered by the pamphlet goes some way to explain why the EKS' original Preface describes Turkey as an "obscure Middle Eastern country"; for the rest, the undoubted ignorance of Turkish affairs by the vast majority of the population in the English speaking world thoroughly justifies the expression. Amusingly, *Programme Communiste* prefers to attribute it to "the prejudices of a citizen of one of the 'great powers' that dominates the world" on the wholly unfounded assumption that the Preface is written by the ICC. Should we conclude that the PCI's own prejudices leave it unable to imagine that an uncompromisingly internationalist position should be adopted by a member of what they like to call the "olive-skinned peoples"?



and Britain - perfectly capable, as we have seen, of despoiling the Empire for their own profit - united to protect the Ottomans against Russian advances during the Crimean War of 1853-56.

Internally, the Ottoman Empire was a hodgepodge of ethnic units whose only cohesion derived from the Sultanate and the Ottoman state itself. The Caliphate was of limited application, since the Empire included large Jewish and Christian populations, not to mention a variety of Muslim sects. Even in Anatolia - the geographical area which roughly corresponds to modern Turkey - national or ethnic unity was lacking. The majority Turkish population, largely made up of peasants farming in extremely backward conditions, lived side by side with Armenians, Kurds, Azeris, Greeks and Jews. Moreover, while some Turkish capital did exist, the great majority of the rising industrial/commercial bourgeoisie was not Turkish but Armenian, Jewish and Greek while other major economic actors were owned by French or German capital. The situation in Turkey is thus comparable to that in Tsarist Russia, where an outdated despotic state structure overlaid a civil society which, for all its backward aspects, was nonetheless integrated into world capitalism as a whole. Unlike Russia, however, the Ottoman state structure was not based on the economically dominant national bourgeoisie.

Although the Sultanate had made some attempts at reform, the experiments with limited parliamentary democracy were short-lived. More concrete results came from collaboration with Germany in the construction of railways linking Anatolia with Baghdad and the Hejaz (Mecca and Medina); these were of particular concern to the British in the years leading up to the war, since they promised to allow both Ottomans and Germans to pose a threat to the Persian oilfields (critical for supplying the British navy) on the one hand, and to Egypt and the Suez Canal (the lifeline to India) on the other. Nor was Britain any more enthusiastic about the Sultan's request for German officers to train the Ottoman army in modern strategy and tactics.

To the rising generation of nationalist revolutionaries who were to form the "Young Turk" movement, it was obvious that the Sultanate was incapable of responding to the pressure imposed by foreign imperialist powers, and building a modern, industrial state. However, the minority status (both national and religious) of the industrial and merchant classes meant that the Young Turk national revolutionary movement which founded the "Committee of Union and Progress" (CUP, in Turkish the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) in 1906 was largely made up, not from a rising industrial class, but from frustrated Turkish army officers and state officials; in its early years the CUP also received considerable support from national minorities (including from the Armenian Dashnak Party, and from the population around Salonika in what is now Greece)

and, initially at least, from Avraam Benaroya's Workers' Socialist Federation. Although it was inspired by the ideas of the French revolution and the efficiency of German military organisation, it cannot properly be called nationalist since its aim was to transform and strengthen the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. In doing so, it inevitably came into conflict with emerging nationalist movements in the Balkan states, and with Greece in particular.

Support for the CUP grew rapidly in the army, to the point where its members felt able, in 1908, to launch a successful military putsch, forcing Sultan Abdulhamit to call a parliament and accept CUP ministers into his government, which they quickly dominated. The CUP's popular base was so narrow, however, that it was rapidly forced out of power and was only able to re-establish its authority by the military occupation of the capital Istanbul; Sultan Abdulhamit was forced to abdicate and was replaced by his younger brother Mehmet V. In theory at least, the Ottoman Empire had become a constitutional monarchy, which the Young Turks hoped would open the way to the Empire's conversion into a modern capitalist state. However, the fiasco of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) was to demonstrate all too clearly how backward the Ottoman Empire was in comparison to the more modern powers.

The "Young Turk revolution", as it became known, thus set the pattern for the creation of the Turkish Republic and indeed for states that were to emerge later from the collapse of the colonial empires: a capitalist state established by the army, as the only force in society with sufficient cohesion to prevent the country from falling apart.

It is unnecessary to give an account of the Ottoman Empire's misadventures following its entry into World War I on Germany's side;<sup>3</sup> suffice it to say that by 1919 the Empire was defeated and dismembered: its Arabian possessions had been divided between the British and the French, while the capital itself was occupied by Allied troops. The Greek ruling class, which had entered the war on the Allied side, now saw an opportunity to realise their *Megali Idea*: a "Greater Greece" which would incorporate into the Greek state those parts of Anatolia which had been Greek in the days of Alexander - essentially the Aegean coast including the major port of Izmir and the Black Sea coastal area known as Pontus.<sup>4</sup> Since these areas were also largely occupied by Turks, such a policy could only be carried out by a programme of pogroms and ethnic cleansing. In May 1919, with tacit British support, the Greek army occupied Izmir. The enfeebled

3 Amid all the crimes perpetrated during World War I, the massacre of the Armenians nonetheless deserves special mention. Out of fear that the Christian Armenian population would collaborate with the Russians, the CUP government and its War Minister Enver Pasha undertook a programme of mass deportations and killings leading to the extermination of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

4 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megali\\_Idea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megali_Idea)

Ottoman government, entirely dependent on the unreliable and rapacious goodwill of the victorious British and French, was incapable of resisting. Resistance was to come, not from the discredited Sultanate in Istanbul, but from the central Anatolian plateau. It is here that "Kemalism" entered the historical stage.

Almost simultaneously with the Greek occupation of Izmir, Mustafa Kemal Pasha - better known to history as Kemal Atatürk - left Istanbul for Samsun on the Black Sea coast. As Inspector of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army, his official duties were to maintain order and to oversee the dismantlement of the Ottoman armies in accordance with the ceasefire agreement with the Allies. His real purpose was to galvanise national resistance to the occupying powers, and in the years to follow Mustafa Kemal was to become the leading figure in Turkey's first truly national movement which led, by 1922, to the abolition of the Sultanate and the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire, the expulsion of Greek armies from Western Anatolia and the creation of today's Turkish Republic.

The year 1920 saw the opening of Turkey's first Grand National Assembly in Ankara. It can also be seen as the moment that events in Russia began once again to play an important role in Turkish history, and vice versa.

The two years following the October Revolution had been desperate ones for the new revolutionary power: the Red Army had had to fight off direct intervention by the capitalist powers, and to wage a bloody civil war against the White armies of Kolchak in Siberia, Denikin on the Don (the north-eastern Black Sea region), and Wrangel in the Crimea. By 1920, the situation was beginning to appear more stable: "Soviet Republics" had been or were about to be created, in Tashkent, Bokhara, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. British troops had been forced to evacuate Baku (the heart of the Caspian Sea oil industry and the region's only real proletarian centre), but remained an ever-present threat in Persia and India. In these circumstances, the national question was of immediate and pressing importance to the Soviet power and to the workers' movement which found its highest political expression in the Communist International (CI): were the national movements a force for reaction or a potential aid to the revolutionary power, as the peasants had been in Russia? How should the workers' movement behave in regions where the workers were still in the minority? What could be expected of nationalist movements like the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, which at least seemed to share a common enemy with the RSFSR<sup>5</sup> in British and French imperialism?

### The debate on the national question

In 1920, these questions lay at the heart of the debates both at the CI's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, which adopted "Theses

on the National Question", and at the "First Congress of the Peoples of the East", better known as the Baku Congress. These events formed, so to speak, the theoretical context for events in Turkey, and it is to these that we will now turn our attention.

Presenting the "Theses on the National Question" to the CI Congress, Lenin declared that "*the most important, the fundamental idea underlying our theses (...) is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations [...] In this age of imperialism, it is particularly important for the proletariat and the Communist International to establish the concrete economic facts and to proceed from concrete realities, not from abstract postulates, in all colonial and national problems*".<sup>6</sup> Lenin's insistence that the national question could only be understood in the context of the "age of imperialism" (what we would call the epoch of capitalism's decadence) was shared by all the participants in the debates that followed. Many however, did not share Lenin's conclusions and tended to pose the national question in terms similar to those used by Rosa Luxemburg:<sup>7</sup> "*In the era of [...]*

6 *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, Vol. 1, New Park, p.109. Also to be found on the marxists.org web site.

7 In its critique of the EKS pamphlet, *Programme Communiste* tries to use Lenin against Luxemburg, even going so far as to claim that Luxemburg, under the name of "Junius" "*puts forward... a national programme of the defence of the fatherland!*" It is true that Luxemburg, like most of her contemporaries including Lenin, was not always free of ambiguities and outmoded references to the national question as it had been treated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Marx and Engels, and by the Social-Democracy more generally. We have already pointed out these ambiguities in *International Review* n°12 (1978), where we defended Lenin's critique of them in his article on the Junius pamphlet. It is also true that a correct economic analysis does not lead automatically to correct political positions (any more than an inadequate economic analysis invalidates correct positions of political principle). *Programme Communiste*, however, fails miserably to come up to Lenin's standard when they shamelessly truncate Luxemburg's words in order to avoid putting before their readers what her so-called "national programme" actually consisted of: "*Yes, socialists should defend their country in great historical crises, and here lies the great fault of the German social democratic Reichstag group. When it announced on the fourth of August, 'in this hour of danger, we will not desert our fatherland,' it denied its own words in the same breath. For truly it has deserted its fatherland in its hour of greatest danger. The highest duty of the social democracy toward its fatherland demanded that it expose the real background of this imperialist war, that it rend the net of imperialist and diplomatic lies that covers the eyes of the people. It was their duty to speak loudly and clearly, to proclaim to the people of Germany that in this war victory and defeat would be equally fatal, to oppose the gagging of the fatherland by a state of siege, to demand that the people alone decide on war and peace, to demand a permanent session of parliament for the period of the war, to assume a watchful control over the government by parliament, and over parliament by the people, to demand the immediate removal of all political inequalities, since only a free people can adequately govern its country, and finally, to oppose to*

5 Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics

*unrestrained imperialism there can be no more national wars. National interests serve only as a means of deceiving, making the working masses serviceable to their mortal enemy, imperialism [...] No suppressed nation can reap freedom and independence from the politics of imperialist states [...] Small nations, whose ruling classes are appendages of their class comrades in the large powers, are merely pawns in the imperialist game of the major powers and are abused as tools during the war; just like the working masses, only to be sacrificed to capitalist interests after the war".*<sup>8</sup>

If we look at the debates on the national question in the CI, we can see three different positions emerging.

### Lenin's position and the "Theses on the National Question"

Lenin's position is necessarily profoundly influenced by the situation of Soviet Russia on the world arena: *"in the current world situation, after the imperialist war; the mutual relations between states, the world system of states, is determined by the struggle of the smaller number of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet powers with Soviet Russia at their head [...] It is only from this standpoint that the political questions of the Communist Parties, not only in the civilised but also in the backward countries, can be posed and answered correctly".*<sup>9</sup> At times, this position could come dangerously close to making the proletarian revolution dependent on the

national revolution in the East: *"The socialist revolution will not be merely, or mainly, the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat of each country against its own bourgeoisie - no, it will be the struggle of all colonies and countries oppressed by imperialism, of all dependent countries, against imperialism".*<sup>10</sup>



Lenin at the Second Congress

The danger of this position is precisely that it tends to make the workers' movement in any one country, and the Comintern's attitude to that movement, dependent

*the imperialist war, based as it was upon the most reactionary forces in Europe, the program of Marx, of Engels, and Lassalle."*

8 "Either/Or", in Rosa Luxemburg's *Selected Political Writings* edited by D Howard, p.349. This is not to say that those delegates who echoed some of Luxemburg's positions could be described as "Luxemburgist", especially since there is no clear evidence that Luxemburg's writings were known to them.

9 Lenin, in *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit.

10 Lenin's report to the Second Congress of the Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 1918, cited in *Marxism and Asia*, Carrère d'Encausse and Schram.

not on the interests of the international working class and the relations between workers of different countries but on the state interests of Soviet Russia.<sup>11</sup> It leaves unanswered the question of what to do when the two conflict. To take one very concrete example: what should be the attitude of Turkish workers and communists in the war between Mustafa Kemal's nationalist movement and the Greek occupying forces? Should it be the revolutionary defeatism adopted by the left wing in both the Greek and Turkish communist parties, or should it be Soviet Russia's military and diplomatic help to the nascent Turkish state, with a view to defeating Greece on the grounds that the latter is a tool of British imperialism?

### Manabendra Nath Roy's position

During the Comintern's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, MN Roy<sup>12</sup> presented his "Supplementary Theses on the national



M N Roy

question" which were debated in committee and presented together with Lenin's Theses, for adoption by the Congress. For Roy, capitalism's continued survival depended on "super-profits" from the colonies: *"European capitalism draws its strength in the main not so much from the industrial countries of Europe as from its colonial possessions. Its existence depends on the control of extensive*

*colonial markets and a broad field of opportunities for exploitation [...] The super-profits made in the colonies forms one of the main sources of the resources of contemporary capitalism. The European working class will only succeed in overthrowing the capitalist order once this source has finally been stopped up".*<sup>13</sup> This pushed Roy towards a view of the world revolution as

11 A striking example of the dominance of Russian state interests can be seen in the Soviet power's attitude to the movement in Guilan (Persia). A study of these events is outside the scope of the present article, but interested readers can find some of the details in Vladimir Genis' study *Les Bolcheviks au Guilan*, published in *Cahiers du Monde russe*, July-September 1999.

12 Manabendra Nath Roy (1887 - 1954), born Narendra Nath Bhattacharya and popularly known as M. N. Roy, was a Bengali Indian revolutionary, internationally known political theorist and activist. He was a founder of the Communist Parties in India and in Mexico. He began his political activity on the extreme wing of Indian nationalism, but moved towards communist positions during a stay in New York during World War I. He fled to Mexico to avoid the attentions of the British secret service and took part in the formation of the Communist Party there. He was invited to attend the Comintern's 2nd Congress and collaborated with Lenin in formulating the Theses on the National Question.

13 Roy's "Supplementary Theses" in 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, op. cit.

dependent on the revolution of the working masses of Asia: *"The East is awakening: and who knows if the formidable tide, that will sweep away the capitalist structure of Western Europe, may not come from there. This is not idle fancy, nor is it mere sentimental brooding. That the final success of the Social Revolution in Europe will depend greatly, if not entirely, on a simultaneous upheaval of the labouring masses of the Orient, can be proved scientifically"*.<sup>14</sup> In Roy's view, however, the revolution in Asia depended on the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. This he saw as being incompatible with support for the democratic nationalist movement: *"The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not therefore mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies [...]. Two movements can be discerned which are growing further and further apart with every day that passes. One of them is the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, which pursues the aim of political liberation with the conservation of the capitalist order; the other is the struggle of the propertyless peasants for their liberation from every kind of exploitation"*.<sup>15</sup> Roy's objections led to the removal from Lenin's draft theses of the idea of support for "bourgeois-democratic" movements; it was replaced by support for "national-revolutionary" movements. The rub lay, however, in the fact that the distinction between the two remained extremely unclear in practice. What exactly was a "national revolutionary" movement that was not also "bourgeois-democratic"? In what way exactly was it "revolutionary" and how could such a movement's "national" characteristics be reconciled with the demands of an international proletarian revolution? These questions were never clarified by the Comintern and their inherent contradictions remained unresolved.

### Sultanzade's position

A third, left, position was perhaps expressed most clearly by Sultanzade,<sup>16</sup> the delegate from the newly-founded Persian CP. Sultanzade rejected both the idea that national revolutions could free themselves from dependence on imperialism, and that the world revolution depended on events in the East: *"Does [...]*

*the fate of communism throughout the world depend on the victory of the social revolution in the East, as comrade Roy assures you? Certainly not. Many comrades in Turkestan are caught up in this error [...]. Let us assume that the communist revolution has begun in India. Would the workers of that country be able to withstand the attack by the bourgeoisie of the entire world without the help of a*



Sultanzade

*big revolutionary movement in England and Europe? Of course not. The suppression of the revolution in China and Persia is clear proof of the fact [...]. If one were to try to proceed according to the Theses in countries which already have ten or more years of experience [...] it would mean driving the masses into the arms of*

*counter-revolution. The task is to create and maintain a purely communist movement in opposition to the bourgeois-democratic one. Any other judgment of the facts could lead to regrettable results"*.<sup>17</sup> That Sultanzade's voice was not an isolated one can be seen from the fact that similar views were being expressed elsewhere. In his report to the Baku Congress, Pavlovitch (who according to some sources<sup>18</sup> worked on the report together with Sultanzade) declares that if *"the Irish separatists succeed in their aim and realise their cherished ideal of an independent Irish people. The very next day, independent Ireland would fall under the yoke of American capital or of the French Bourse, and, perhaps, within a year or two Ireland would be fighting against Britain or some other states in alliance with one of the world predators, for markets, for coal-mines, for iron-mines, for bits of territory in Africa, and once again hundreds of thousands of British, Irish, American and other workers would die in this war [...]. The example [...] of bourgeois Poland, which is now behaving as a hangman towards the national minorities on its own territory, and serving as the gendarme of international capitalism for struggle against the workers and peasants of Russia; or the example of the Balkan states - Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece - squabbling amongst themselves over the division of the booty and over their desire to annex to their own territory some*

<sup>14</sup> *"The awakening of the East"*, 1920.

<sup>15</sup> "Supplementary Theses".

<sup>16</sup> Sultanzade was in fact of Armenian origin: his real name was Avetis Mikailian. He was born in 1890 into a poor peasant family in Marageh (North-West Persia). He joined the Bolsheviks in 1912, probably in St Petersburg. He worked for the CI in Baku and Turkestan, and was one of the main organisers of the Persian CP's first congress in Anzali in June 1920. He was present at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Comintern as delegate of the Persian party. He remained on the left of the CI, and opposed to the "nationalist leaders" of the East (such as Kemal); he was also profoundly critical of the Comintern's so-called "experts" on Persia and the East. He died in Stalin's purges some time between 1936 and 1938. See Cosroe Chaqeri's study on Sultanzade in *Iranian Studies*, spring-summer 1984.

<sup>17</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, op. cit., pp.135-6.

<sup>18</sup> See Cosroe Chaqeri, op.cit. In *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 40/3, July-September 1999, Vladimir Genis mentions a report drawn up jointly by Pavlovitch and Sultanzade, at Lenin's request following the Comintern's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, on "the objectives of the communist party in Persia". The report proposes to undertake massive propaganda *"for the complete elimination of private property and for the transfer of land to the peasants, since the landlord class cannot support the revolution either against the Shah, or even against the British"*.



nation which was only yesterday under the Turkish yoke; and a whole number of other facts of the same sort show that the formation of national states in the East, in which power has passed from the foreign rulers who have been driven out into the hands of the local capitalists and landlords, does not in itself constitute a great step forward in the matter of improving the position of the popular masses.

"Within the framework of the capitalist system, any newly-formed state which does not express the interests of the toiling masses but serves the interests of the bourgeoisie is a new instrument of oppression and coercion, a new factor of war and violence. [...] If the struggle in Persia, India and Turkey were to lead merely to the capitalists and landlords of those countries, with their national parliaments and senates, coming to power, the masses of the people would have gained nothing. Every newly-formed state would be rapidly drawn, by the very course of events and the iron logic of the laws of capitalist economy, into the vicious circle of militarism and imperialist politics, and after a few decades we should witness another world war [...] for the interests of the French, German, British, Indian, Chinese, Persian and Turkish bankers and factory-owners [...] Only the dictatorship of the proletariat and, in general, of the working masses, liberated from foreign oppression and having overthrown capital completely, will provide the backward countries with a guarantee that these countries will not, like the states formed from fragments of the Austro-Hungarian empire and Tsarist Russia Poland, White Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, Armenia - or formed from fragments of Turkey - Venizelist Greece and the rest be new instruments for war, plunder and coercion."<sup>19</sup>

Grigori Safarov (who was to play an important part in the development of the TKP) put the problem more clearly in his *Problemy Vostoka*: "...it must be emphasized that only **the development of proletarian revolution in Europe** makes the victory of agrarian-peasant revolution in the East possible [...] The imperialist system of states has no place for peasant republics. Numerically insignificant cadres of local proletarians and semi-proletarian rural and urban elements **can carry with them** broad peasant masses into the battle against imperialism and feudal elements, but this requires an **international revolutionary situation** which would enable them to ally themselves with the proletariat of the advanced countries".<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, Pavlovitch's report, which we have cited, is not a model of clarity and contains a number of contradictory ideas. Elsewhere in the report, for example, he refers to "revolutionary Turkey" ("*The*

*Greek occupation of Thrace and Adrianople is aimed at isolating revolutionary Turkey and Soviet Russia from the revolutionary Balkans*"). He even goes so far as to take up a suggestion from "the Turkish comrades" (presumably the group around Mustafa Suphi) "*that the question of the Dardanelles should be decided by the states bordering on the Black Sea, excluding participation by Wrangel<sup>21</sup> and the Entente*", and continues that "*We warmly welcome this idea, the realisation of which would be a first and decisive step towards a federation of all the peoples and countries whose territories adjoin the Black Sea*".<sup>22</sup> This only goes to show that the revolutionaries of the day were confronting, in practice and in conditions of extreme difficulty, new problems which had no easy solutions. In such a situation, a certain degree of confusion was probably inevitable. Let us remark in passing, though, that the "left" positions are being put forward, not by Western intellectuals or armchair revolutionaries, but precisely by those who, on the ground, would have to put the Comintern's policy into practice.

### The national question in practice

It should be emphasized that the positions we have outlined here, rather schematically, were not set in stone. The Comintern was confronted with problems and questions that were wholly new: capitalism as a whole was still at the watershed between its period of triumphant ascendancy and the "epoch of wars and revolutions" (to use the CI's expression); the opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat was finding expression in an opposition between the Soviet power and capitalist states; and communists in the East were having to "*adapt [themselves] to specific conditions of a sort not met with in European countries*".<sup>23</sup>

It has to be said that in confronting these new questions, the Comintern's leaders could sometimes reveal a surprising naivety. Here is Zinoviev, speaking at the Baku Congress: "*We can support a democratic policy such as has now taken shape in Turkey and such as will perhaps tomorrow make its appearance in other countries. We support and will support national movements like those in Turkey, Persia, India and China [...] the task of this [current national] movement is to help the East free itself from British imperialism. But we have a task of our own to carry out, no less great - to help the toilers of the East in their struggle against the rich, and here and now to help them build their own Communist organisations, [...] to prepare them for a real labour revolution.*"<sup>24</sup> Zinoviev was

<sup>19</sup> It is significant that he poses things in these terms. See <http://marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/ch05.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Cited in *Marxism and Asia*, op.cit. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>21</sup> Wrangel was one of the counter-revolutionary generals whose military campaigns against the revolution were financed by the major powers - in Wrangel's case in particular by the French.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Lenin, speaking to the Congress of Communist Organisations of Peoples of the East. Cited in *Marxism and Asia*, p168.

<sup>24</sup> <http://marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/ch01.htm>



doing no more than echoing Lenin's report on the national question to the Comintern's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress: "as communists we will only support the bourgeois freedom movements in the colonial countries if these movements are really revolutionary and if their representatives are not opposed to us training and organising the peasantry in a revolutionary way."<sup>25</sup>

In effect, the policy that Zinoviev is putting forth - and which the Soviet power at first tried to put into effect - assumes that the national movements will accept the Soviet power as an ally, while at the same time allowing the communists a free hand in organising the workers to overthrow them. But nationalist leaders like Mustafa Kemal were not idiots, nor were they blind to their own interests. Kemal - to take the Turkish example - was prepared to let the communists organise only insofar as he needed the support of Soviet Russia against the British and the Greeks. Kemal's determination to keep the popular enthusiasm for communism - which certainly existed and was gaining ground however confusedly - firmly under control, even led to the bizarre creation of an "official" Communist Party whose central committee included the leading generals of the Turkish army! This CP was at least perfectly clear (indeed a good deal clearer than the Comintern) on the radical incompatibility between nationalism and communism, and on the implications of this incompatibility. As the "official" CP's organ *Anadoluda Yeni Gün* put it: "At the present moment, the program of communist ideas is not only harmful, but even ruinous, for the country. When a soldier realizes that there does not have to be a fatherland, he will not have to go out to defend it; hearing that there does not have to be hatred of nations, he will not go out and fight the Greeks".<sup>26</sup> The Party ideologue Mahmud Esat Bozkurt declared unambiguously that "Communism is not an ideal, but a means for the Turks. The ideal for the Turks is the unity of the Turkish nation".<sup>27</sup>

In short, the Soviet power would be an acceptable ally for the nationalists only insofar as it acted as an expression, not of proletarian internationalist but of Russian national interests.

The consequences of the Comintern's policy towards Turkey were spelled out by Agis Stinas in his Memoirs published in 1976: "The Russian government and the Communist International had characterised the war led by Kemal as a war of national liberation and had 'in consequence' judged it as progressive, and for that reason supported it politically and diplomatically and sent him advisors, arms and money. If we consider that Kemal was fighting a foreign invasion to liberate the Turkish soil, his struggle had a character of national liberation. But was there anything progressive about

it? We believed this and supported it then. But how can we defend the same thesis today? For something to be progressive in our era and to be considered as progressive it must contribute to the raising of the class consciousness of the worker masses, to developing their capacity to struggle for their own emancipation. What has the creation of the modern Turkish state contributed to this? Kemal (...) threw the Turkish Communists into the jails where he hanged them, and then finally turned his back on Russia, establishing cordial relations with the imperialists and giving himself the job of protecting their interests. **The correct policy, in line with the interests of the proletarian revolution, would have been to call on the Greek and Turkish soldiers to fraternise, and the popular masses to struggle together, without letting themselves be stopped by national, racial and religious differences, for the republic of workers' and peasants' councils in Asia Minor.** Independently of the policy of Russia and the objectives of Kemal, the duty of Greek Communists was definitely one of intransigent struggle against the war."<sup>28</sup>

The importance of the Turkish Left's experience lies not in its theoretical heritage but in the fact that the struggle between nationalism and communism in the East was played out in Turkey to the bitter end, not in debate but on the ground, in the class struggle.<sup>29</sup> The Turkish Left's fight against opportunism within the Party, and against the repression of the Kemalist state, which dipped its hands in workers' blood from its very birth, mercilessly exposed the failings and ambiguities

28 [Stinas](#), (our emphasis). For a brief summary of Stinas' memoirs (unfortunately not available in full in English), see [our article in International Review n°72](#).

29 As the pamphlet puts it, "The left wing of the TKP was a movement shaped around opposition to the national liberation movement for practical reasons because of its terrible consequences for the workers, bringing them only pain and death". Both EKS when the pamphlet was written, and the ICC, were and are well aware that the Turkish Left does not occupy the same place in the theoretical and organisational development of the Communist Left as the Italian Left, for example. This is why the pamphlet is titled "The left wing of the TKP" rather than "The Turkish Communist Left". Apparently this distinction is not clear to *Programme Communiste*. But then *Programme Communiste* tends to treat the Communist Left as their personal property, claiming that only the Italian Left "placed itself on the basis of orthodox marxism" ("orthodox marxism" is itself a ludicrous notion which is entirely - dare we say so - unmarxist). *Programme Communiste* then goes into a long discussion about all the different currents, right and left, in the "young communist movement" and very learnedly informs us that they could be "right" or "left" depending on the changes in political line in the Comintern, citing Zinoviev's characterisation of Bordiga in 1924. But why is no mention made of Lenin's pamphlet written against "Left-Wing Communism", specifically in Italy, Germany, Holland, and Britain? Unlike *Programme Communiste*, Lenin at least had no difficulty in seeing that there was something in common among the "Left Wing Communists" - even if, of course, we do not agree with his description of Left Communism as a "childhood illness"!

25 Op. cit.

26 Cited in George S Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, p.82.

27 Ibid.

of the Comintern's Theses on the National Question.  
The struggle of Manatov, Haçioğlu and their comrades,  
belongs to the internationalist heritage of the workers'  
movement.

8<sup>th</sup> June 2010

## **Socialism and the Workers' Movement in the Ottoman Empire**

In 1889 the Second International was founded as a result of the attempts of the socialist parties of Western European countries such as Germany, France and Belgium to bring together different social democratic parties of the time. For the most part, the world communist movement of the future would emerge from this organization. While the Second International remained focused on Western Europe from its foundation to its collapse, and while it was designed from the start as a federation of national parties rather than a centralized structure, it was nevertheless to become a magnet for all the socialist movements of the time, from North and South America to the Far East.

Even before the formation of the Second International socialist organizations had been formed in several countries outside Western Europe. Nevertheless, social democratic parties were to become widespread only after its formation. In 1891, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party was founded under the leadership of Dimitar Blagoev, which was to be renamed the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party following its merger in 1894 with the Union of Bulgarian Social Democrats formed by Yanko Sakazov. In 1892 the Polish Socialist Party was formed and a year later the faction led by Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches, the Polish Workers' Union, left to form its own party. In 1896, the first socialist party of South America, the Socialist Party of Argentina, was formed. In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party emerged from the seeds of the Emancipation of Labor group formed by Marxists such as George Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod fifteen years previously. In 1901 the Japanese Social Democratic Party was founded by Sen Katayama and in 1903 the Serbian Social Democratic Party was formed on the basis of the Erfurt program of the German Social Democratic Party. In 1904, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party took the initiative to form the Muslim Social Democratic Hummet Party in Azerbaijan with the aim of appealing to the Central Asian workers. This was followed by the Social Democratic Party of Iran, founded in 1905, and in 1909, the Greek Socialist Party was formed by Platon Drakoulis.

Like their sister parties in Western Europe an overwhelming majority of the socialist tendencies organizing into parties outside Western Europe had their roots in the workers' movement and gained strength on the basis of the workers' movement. Although not to the same extent as in Western Europe, the conditions of capitalism in the period between 1890 and 1910 gave some of these parties the opportunity to become mass organizations. Consequently, the same opportunist, reformist and revisionist tendencies that affected the Western European parties also started to

appear in the parties outside Western Europe. This in turn resulted in the formation of left wings in opposition to these tendencies in these parties also. Similarly, despite all of the elements claiming to defend the slogan of internationalism, there was no definitive test of which were true to the principles of internationalism and which weren't. The workers' and socialist movements to appear in the Ottoman Empire developed in the framework of this general situation.

### **Industrialisation, capitalism and the first workers' struggles in the Ottoman Empire**

Unsurprisingly, the source of the bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire and of the expansion of capitalism into Ottoman lands was in its relations with the capitalist West. Again unsurprisingly, it was the extremely large and significant non-Muslim minority, with its closer relations to the West, which first introduced capitalist relations to Ottoman society. The development of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire was directly tied to Western capital, trade and patronage. The non-Muslim traders and shopkeepers of the pre-capitalist period, while not a particularly significant part of non-Muslim communities, became increasingly important by enlarging their businesses and accumulating capital in an environment where most of the riches came from the land and agriculture.<sup>30</sup>

Unsurprisingly yet again, this increasing social dominance of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie had its reflections in the ideological field as well, through the creation of schools to teach positive sciences even in the most remote villages, and spreading new bourgeois ideas such as liberalism and nationalism. Thus, for the first time in Ottoman history, as industrialization and capitalist relations began in the cities, bourgeois ideology was also being spread in the countryside. With the intensification of migration from the countryside, a working class was formed from the work force in the factories. However, the top level of the Ottoman state was not happy with these developments, which it saw as completely against its order and world-view, and its solution was to adopt extremely repressive measures. This resulted in the developing bourgeoisie sharpening the nationalist aspects of its ideology and led to the first national liberation struggles in the Ottoman Empire. Certain groups of the Ottoman non-Muslim bourgeoisie, like the Greeks, managed to lead successful national liberation struggles and form their own nation states. Other groups, however, the Armenians in particular, failed to create nation states because, unlike the Greeks, there was no special area where they were concentrated in the population. Due to this, the importance of non-Muslims in the industrial bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire continued and the

30 "Osmanlı Devletinde Toplumsal Mücadeleler." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1783

politics of this rising force started to influence Ottoman politics. Both the non-Muslim bourgeoisie and the Western capitalism that supported it demanded certain reforms of repression in the Empire<sup>31</sup>.



These forces had an unexpected 'ally'; another force which had surprisingly similar demands. This was the Ottoman state bureaucracy. Following the failures of the Ottoman Empire in its attempts to compete with European states in the previous centuries, the idea of not only importing weapons but also technology, bourgeois ways of management, industry and science from the West in order to be able to compete began to develop among the state bureaucracy. In this sense, in an historically quite curious way, the base of the state symbolizing the ancien régime, started to radicalize, defending the capitalization of the society and even demanding a transformation to the democratic bourgeois state model. This was connected with the appearance of the seeds of capitalist relations within the Ottoman state.<sup>32</sup> The most significant effects of this general situation were the independence of Greece (1829), Bulgaria (1876) and Serbia (1878), and the declarations by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire of the Imperial Edict of Reorganization (1839) and the 1st Constitutional Regime (1876). All this showed that capitalism was rapidly developing along two channels in the Empire - non-Muslim capital and the state bureaucracy. In addition, after the 1830s private industries also started replacing artisans among Muslims.<sup>33</sup>

Unavoidably the appearance of capitalist relations

quickly resulted in class struggles by thousands of recently proletarianized people. From the 1800s there were protests in the factories. There were also demonstrations in several parts of the Empire against high taxes. Initially the most common action of the workers' movement in the Ottoman Empire was sabotage of machinery, etc. Towards the end of the century these were abandoned in favor of strikes as more effective actions, but until these became more common, acts of sabotage continued. The government's response was repression. The first recorded strike in the Ottoman Empire was in 1863, in the Ereğli coal mines, but according to records strikes became widespread from the beginning of the 1870s. Industry was developing rapidly during this period and many experts and workers were sent out from countries like England, France and Italy. In February 1872, following a one day strike of English shipbuilding workers in Constantinople, telegraph workers in Pera went on strike. In April, workers on the Haydarpasha-Izmit railroad went on strike. All the workers struggled together, especially in the railway strike. In this way native workers with little or no experience of struggle were able to tie up with European workers, to discuss with them and gain first hand knowledge of the experiences of the European working class. These experiences spread from neighborhood to neighborhood, from coffee house to coffee house in working class areas. In January 1873, hundreds of native Christian and Muslim shipyard workers from Kasimpasha went on a week-long strike together. In 1875, native and foreign workers, this time numbering over a thousand, again went on a strike against horrific conditions of exploitation.<sup>34</sup> 1876 turned out to be a year in which very important workers' actions took place at the heart of the Ottoman Empire. In Constantinople, workers in fez factories, arsenals, printworks and shipyards as well as tram and railroad workers of different ethnic backgrounds organized strikes and demonstrations. In Kocaeli, there was a railroad workers' strike. In Izmir, striking sewing workers formed a workers' committee - another first in Ottoman history. Thousands of workers participated in the strike wave of 1876<sup>35</sup>. Strikes continued, albeit in decreasing numbers, until 1895. Sultan Abdulhamid II belatedly realized the threat posed by workers' actions and his regime of repression was intensified after 1878, severely hitting workers' struggles. While heavy repression could not stop strikes for good, for a while it did manage to make such action a rare event. But in 1902 the working class resumed its struggles in a more massive and militant way,<sup>36</sup> and it was these experiences that led to the formation of the first socialist tendencies and militant workers' organizations of the Ottoman Empire.

31 "Osmanlı Devletinde Toplumsal Mücadeleler." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1784

32 "Osmanlı Devletinde Toplumsal Mücadeleler." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1785

33 "Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1796

34 Ibid, pp. 1797, 1798, 1800

35 Ibid, pp. 1797, 1798, 1802-1805

36 Kırpık, Cevdet. "Osmanlı Devleti'nde İşçiler ve İşçi Hareketleri (1876-1914)". Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü. 2004. Isparta. p. 251-252



## The birth of socialism in the Ottoman Empire

The first socialist party in the Ottoman Empire was the Revolutionary Hunchak Party, formed in 1890. This was on the basis of the circle around the publication Hunchak ('The Bell') launched three years previously by seven Armenians from the Caucasus studying in Geneva and strongly influenced by marxism.<sup>37</sup> Avetis Nazarbekian, Mariam Vardanian, Gevorg Gharadjian, Ruben Khan-Azad, Christopher Ohanian, Gabriel Kafian and Manuel Manuelian<sup>38</sup>. Moving from Geneva to Constantinople in 1889, Khan-Azad



Աւետիս Նազարբեկեան  
Avetis Nazarbekian

immediately started to set up the first Hunchak political organizations in the Empire.<sup>39</sup> While it had its initial roots in Europe, the main focus of the Hunchak Party was in the Ottoman Empire, although it was more of an Armenian organization than an Ottoman one, which led it to conduct activities in the Caucasus, Iran and

Europe. Caucasian issues in particular were to have a real effect on the evolution of the party.

The Hunchaks published their maximum and minimum programs in 1888. The maximum program stated:

*"The current social order is based on injustice, oppression and slavery. This organization based on economical slavery can only develop among the powerful ones who believe only in the reality of fists, who pillage the working class and who thus create inequality and injustice in human relationships. This inequality manifests itself in all the spheres of life, whether economical, political, social or physical. A small minority of humanity, using the sweat and blood of the power of labor have taken power and consolidated it, gaining social and political privileges.*

*Private property depends on the slavery of humanity in various forms. The basic principle and the primary characteristic of the minority ruling the world today is this.*

*Socialist organization alone, by creating and securing the direct power of the people, by giving everyone the possibility to directly participate in the organization of social affairs can find a solution*

*to this sad and unjust situation. The socialist system truly defends the natural and irrefutable rights of human beings; is for every individual realizing all their strengths, all their talents and potentials to the fullest extent; organizes all sorts of social and economical relations peacefully, becomes a real expression of the will of the people.*

*Based on these basic beliefs, the Hunchak group is socialist."*<sup>40</sup>

The minimum program showed that the Hunchaks saw the Ottoman Empire and specifically Turkish Armenia as the focus of their activities:

*"The Armenian people in Turkish Armenia today live as a society under all the fetters of political and economical slavery. It is being crushed under all sorts of direct or indirect taxes which rise two-fold or three-fold every time the economically bankrupt government has a new economical crisis. Its lands are constantly being attacked by the government and the product of its labor is being pillaged both by the state and by private individuals. People stuck in this situation are working and producing only to feed the government and the ever-hungry classes. (...)*

*For liberating the people from poverty, leading it to the correct course and realizing socialist organization which is the final goal, the formation of a democracy of the masses and the obtainment of political freedom and national independence are necessary short term goals."*<sup>41</sup>

This program especially shows the marks of the stage-ist understanding of the Second International; the first goal of the group was the national liberation of Turkish Armenia, and in a manner leaving no place for doubt it was stated that socialism could only be possible following this. The Hunchak program in general did not go beyond the limits of social democracy at this time. Hunchaks were the first to publish the Communist Manifesto in Armenian, but despite being very critical of the idea of appealing to Western powers on behalf of Armenia, which was very popular among the Armenian nationalists of the time, and despite making efforts to win the support of the Muslim population and publishing in Turkish, Armenian nationalism was an influence on the group. The Hunchaks also defended the necessity of individual

37 Turabian, Hagop. "The Armenian Social-Democratic Hentchakist Party Part 1". Ararat No. 34. April 1916. London.

[http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical\\_turabian.html](http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_turabian.html)

38 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Democrat\\_Hunchakian\\_Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democrat_Hunchakian_Party)

39 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruben\\_Khan-Azat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruben_Khan-Azat)

40 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. p. 185

41 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 186

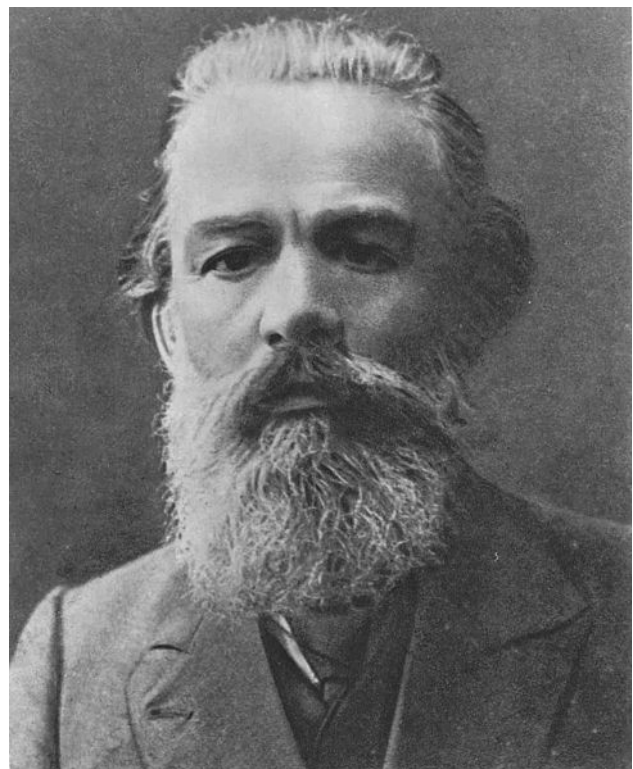
armed actions,<sup>42</sup> which showed that the influence of the Russian Narodnik (Populist) tradition was strong on their leaders, as was that of Plekhanov who they knew personally. The name of group itself was an Armenian translation of Kolokol, the magazine of Alexander Herzen, who had strongly influenced the Narodnik tradition.<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 1890, as a delegate of the Revolutionary Hunchak Party, Khan-Azad participated in a meeting of Armenian nationalists, some coming from the tradition of the Russian socialist-revolutionary party, others anti-socialists. This was held with the intention of forming a new organization, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Dashnaksutjun. As a result of the almost superhuman efforts of Dashnak leaders coming from the socialist-revolutionary party like Christopher Mikaelian and Simon Zavarian, the meeting adopted a manifesto which defended socialism without mentioning it, and the Revolutionary Hunchak Party agreed to join the new organization..<sup>44</sup> Unity was short-lived, however, lasting only six months. In the Caucasus, Hunchak militants were excluded from the local organization. More importantly it quickly became obvious that it was the anti-socialist faction and not socialists like Mikaelian and Zavarian who were in the driving seat. In May 1891 the Hunchak Party made a statement declaring it had nothing to do with the Dashnaks.<sup>45</sup>

Between its formation in 1890 and 1896 the Revolutionary Hunchak Party had a period of intense activity. However this was not of the kind a social democratic party with a marxist orientation would take – it was mostly on a national basis and was rather Narodnik in style. Until 1896 the Hunchaks organized mass demonstrations in places like Kum Kapu and Bab Ali in Constantinople, and engaged in armed resistance in towns in the East such as Sason, Zeitun and Van against state-organized anti-Armenian pogroms. But despite being active in the Association of Revolutionary Armenian Workers formed in 1892 in Tbilisi and organized in Caucasian towns such as Gyumri, Kars, Ganja and Baku, the Hunchaks did not fulfil the goals stated in their 1888 program regarding actively participating in and contributing to the struggles of the workers and the peasants.<sup>46</sup> The

conflict between national liberation movements and the struggles of the working class was far from being obvious in this period. The founders and leaders of the Hunchak Party were, although not very clear, convinced socialists; the party's minimum program, however, caused a different practice to dominate the party, and this in turn shaped the party's membership. This situation could not last.

The Revolutionary Hunchak Party had become socialist under the influence of Russian marxism, and the first Ottoman socialists had been Armenians. However Russian marxism was not to be the only influence on the development of socialism in the Ottoman Empire, nor were socialist ideas to develop only among the Armenians. The tradition of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, formed in 1891 and which took the name of Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party in 1894, was to have a much more direct influence on the development of Ottoman socialism. In 1894, a young militant of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party sowed the seeds of the first socialist organization in Ottoman Macedonia. Vasil Glavinov was born there, in the city of Veles, in 1872 and had been introduced to the opinions of Dimitar Blagoev, the leading marxist in Bulgaria, in 1892, becoming a militant of Blagoev's party. In 1896, after working on a series of publications, Glavinov and his comrades formed the Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia which operated throughout the Ottoman Macedonian province.<sup>47</sup>



*Dimitar Blagoev*

Glavinov's socialism was the socialism of Blagoev. And Blagoev had always been in the left wing of the

42 Nalbandian, Louise. "The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party 1887-1896"

[http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical\\_nalbandian.html](http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_nalbandian.html)

43 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)". İletişim. 1992. Istanbul. p. 22

44 Nalbandian, Louise. "The Armenian Revolutionary Movement 1890-1896". University of California Press. 1975. Los Angeles. p.153-154

45 Ibid, p. 163-164

46 Nalbandian, Louise. "The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party 1887-1896"

[http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical\\_nalbandian.html](http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_nalbandian.html)

47 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasil\\_Glavinov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasil_Glavinov)

Second International. So from its inception socialism in Ottoman Macedonia was organized directly by one of the significant tendencies of the left wing of the international socialist movement, and this was to form a strong base for the future left wing of the Ottoman socialist movement. As for Macedonia itself, the socialist movement formed on the basis of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party evolved in parallel with the phases of Bulgarian socialism. Glavinov and his comrades reflected the general opinions of the Bulgarian Party. However, the question of Macedonia and the position Macedonian socialists should adopt, was to play a very significant role in the Bulgarian Party, and influences changed over time. The 1890s were historically a very eventful period where differences within the socialist movement were far from being clear, and the weaknesses of the first Macedonian socialists reflected those of Bulgarian socialism. This was most clearly expressed in the initial weaknesses of Bulgarian socialism on the national question within the socialist movement in Macedonia. Just as there was the Armenian question for the Ottoman Empire in general, there was also a national question in Ottoman Macedonia. In 1893 an armed national liberation movement appeared which was to take many names but is perhaps best known today as the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. This had two aims, one secret and the other public: publicly its aim was to secure the autonomy of Macedonia and Adrianople<sup>48</sup>; secretly it plotted to create liberated territories in Macedonia and to merge with Bulgaria.<sup>49</sup>

Since he returned from Russia in 1885 and started to defend marxist ideas in Bulgaria, Blagoev put forward the idea of a Balkan Federation on the basis of proletarian independence, arguing that the liberation of Macedonia could only be achieved on this basis. Furthermore, at its second congress in 1892 the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party formed by Blagoev resolved not to work jointly with any bourgeois or petty-bourgeois structures; a position strongly defended by Blagoev himself.<sup>50</sup> However, when confronted with nationalist ideas emerging within the minorities they were organizing among, the Bulgarian and Macedonian socialists, just like the Armenian socialists, did not initially see any contradiction between participating in nationalist movements and their socialist convictions. Blagoev himself was for a while a member of the High Macedonia Committee in Sofia as well as his own party<sup>51</sup> and Macedonian socialists also participated in the activities of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in its

first years. Both Blagoev and the weekly paper *Revoljutsiya*, the first socialist publication in Macedonia,, also unconditionally and enthusiastically supported the nationalist uprising of 1885 in Macedonia.<sup>52</sup>



*Vasil Glavinov*

Yet the publication *Političeska Svoboda* (Political Freedom), of Glavinov's Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia, launched in 1898, was to develop a very different attitude to the Macedonian question than that of *Revoljutsiya*. The line put forward by Glavinov, as well as being far more sober than the one he had enthusiastically defended three years previously, was also clearly based on proletarian internationalism. Glavinov accused the Bulgarian state of pursuing expansionist goals in Macedonia and strongly condemned it. He defended the view that Macedonia should be a founding part of a socialist Balkan Federation, in which there would be no oppression of any ethnic group; all would be able to speak their native languages, and official languages would be determined based on the majorities in specific provinces. *Političeska Svoboda* emphasized clearly that workers of Macedonia should realize their ideological class duties and denounced chauvinism, patriotism and especially Bulgarian nationalism

48 The modern Turkish city of Edirne.

49 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. Istanbul. p. 42

50 Ibid, p. 43

51 Ibid, p. 44

52 Ibid.

whenever it could.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of Macedonian independence was still defended:

*“The revolutionary socialists of Macedonia aim for the peoples of Macedonia and Adrianople to obtain a total political and economical freedom, guided by the most humane and progressive ideas.”*<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, similar to the stage-ist perspective of the Revolutionary Hunchak Party, it also said that after such freedom was obtained, a struggle for social revolution in the country would then have to be waged. *Političeska Svoboda* also defended the necessity of working with anyone convinced of the same final goal of liberation; that is socialism, regardless of nationality<sup>55</sup>. Such positions of the Macedonian socialists were important because they showed that although they still hadn't managed to develop a clear position on the national question, they had effectively drawn the lessons of the uprising of 1895 and represented an attempt to develop an internationalist solution to the Macedonian question. Nevertheless the analysis put forward, while pointing in a certain direction, did not last. In the meantime, the question of the position taken by the Macedonian socialists on this question was becoming quite serious.

The first workers' organization to arise from the Muslim population was formed by arsenal workers in Tophane, Constantinople, in 1894 or 1895. The clandestine Ottoman Workers' Society aimed to organize the workers and incite them to rise against Abdulhamid II. Following a year of activity, the leadership of this organization, now seen by the authorities as a serious threat, was arrested and the group dispersed. The founders returned to Constantinople in 1901-2 and made an attempt to regroup. These efforts were met with great interest and there were many discussion meetings with the aim of re-founding the organization, but the leading militants were again arrested and state repression destroyed these attempts.<sup>56</sup> According to various sources, the Ottoman Workers' Society was very much influenced by the Paris Commune, and hoped to spread the ideas defended in Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto.<sup>57</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg, a revolutionary militant known for her stance against national liberation movements, could write about the Ottoman Empire of 1890:

*“[T]he Christian lands are bound to Turkey only by force, they have no working-class movement, they are declining by virtue of a natural social development, or rather dissolution, and hence the aspirations to freedom can here make themselves felt only in a national struggle; therefore our partisanship cannot and must not admit of any doubt. It is not our job to draw up practical demands for the Armenians, or to determine the political form which should be aspired to here; for this, Armenia's own aspirations would have to be taken into consideration, as well as its internal conditions and the international context. For us, the question in this situation is above all the general standpoint, and this requires us to stand for the insurgents and not against them.”*<sup>58</sup>

Luxemburg's comments on the situation of the Ottoman Empire and the working class movement were soon to be proven wrong. On the other hand such a statement made by an internationalist militant not in any way anxious to support national struggles showed how low the level of class struggle was in the Ottoman Empire in the first years after the emergence of socialist ideas. Under such conditions, it had been impossible for this socialist movement to make a clear and practical statement on the national question. What was to clarify this question for the movement was the re-emergence of class struggles in the Ottoman Empire and neighboring countries after the turn of the century.

### The development of the Left Wing of Armenian and Macedonian socialism

After three years organizing and six years of intense activity, by 1896 two clear factions had appeared within the Revolutionary Hunchak Party. One was led by Avetis Nazarbekian and his wife Maro Vardanian, who controlled the party center. The other was formed by their opponents. However this split within the Party was far from being simply about the personalities of Nazarbekian and Vardanian. The dissidents were opposing a very basic and integral part of the party line, namely that it was socialist. In their opinion, the statement made by the center tying the Armenian question to the workers' question in Russia was a very serious mistake and by doing this the center was scaring not only the conservative Armenian bourgeoisie and Muslim society but also the bourgeois states of the West who were not interested in supporting any emergent socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire<sup>59</sup>. The solution, according to the

53 Mishkova, Diana. “We, the people: politics of national peculiarity in Southeastern Europe”. Central European University Press, 2009. p. 122

54 Adanır, Fikret. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği”. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik” Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 46

55 Adanır, Fikret. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği”. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik” Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 47

56 “Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma.” Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1816

57 “Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma.” Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim

Yayınları, 1988. p. 1816

58 Luxemburg, Rosa. “Social Democracy and the National Struggles in Turkey”. 1896. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1896/10/10.htm>

59 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992.



opposition, was the removal of socialism from the party program, since they did not think socialism was necessary for the liberation of Turkish Armenia. The opposition demanded a convention for electing a new central committee. The socialist faction did not want this, so in August 1896 the dissidents held a meeting on their own in London. The socialist wing condemned the dissidents for this and held the ordinary 2nd Congress of the Party, also in London, without them. In this Congress, practices such as mass demonstrations and armed actions were rejected and continuing to uphold the socialist doctrine was strongly emphasized. The split between the nationalist opposition and the socialist center was complete.<sup>60</sup>



*Demonstration in Thessaloniki*

Two years later, at a convention again held in London the former Hunchak dissidents officially formed their new party, the Veragazmiya or Reformed Hunchak Party. Following the split, the opposition was initially stronger within the Ottoman Empire and Egypt whereas the socialist faction had a significant majority in the Caucasus.<sup>61</sup> However, it soon became evident that the Veragazmiya Hunchak Party was far from being strong enough within the Armenian national movement to play the leading role it wished. Because there was a new organization which wanted to take the place filled by the Revolutionary Hunchak Party before 1896; the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Dashnaksutyun, and Veragazmiya was not going to be able to do more than tail this new force. As for the Hunchak Party, it started to have a social democratic practice in a meaningful sense only after 1896. Now at the core of its activities was the translation of marxist theoretical works into Armenian and publishing them, as well as continuing the general work of propaganda.

The Revolutionary Hunchak Party no longer included the anti-socialist elements nurtured by its own practice and in part by its own ideology. Nevertheless, while its general orientation was now quite clearly based on social democracy, it could not be said that it was on the

left of social democracy; nor could it generally be said that nationalist Armenian politics were abandoned for internationalist class struggle. The anti-socialist right wing of the Party had left; yet the party was not at a point where it could satisfy those left wing elements who saw class struggle as the only solution. The first region where the Armenian marxist left began to leave the Party was unsurprisingly the Caucasus where it had been most involved in the class struggle. Here there was a more advanced working class with a history and experience of struggle far greater than its counterpart in the Ottoman Empire. Here the 1890s had not been a period of defeat and repression for the working class as it was for the Ottoman proletariat.

The first organization of the Armenian marxist left was the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group, founded in 1898 in Tbilisi. Its leading founders were: Gevorg Gharadjian, Melik Melikian, Karekin Kozikian, Haik Pilosian, Achot Khoumerian and Assadour Kakhoian. Gevorg Gharadjian, also known as Arkomedes, was born in the Caucasus, was one of the founders of the Hunchak magazine and, along with Avetis Nazarbekian and Maro Vardanian, was one of the writers of the Hunchak program. He had also translated the Communist Manifesto into Armenian by comparing its French and Russian translations. Gharadjian left the Hunchaks a short time after the founding of the group. He had continued to participate in the struggle in the Caucasus, especially in the Tbilisi workers' movement, and had been a member of social democratic organizations in this city. Melik Melikian, also known as Dedushka, had been born in a village which today is inside the borders of Azerbaijan and had first encountered the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus in 1890. Karekin Kozikian, writing under the name Yessalem, was born in Kharput in the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and had emigrated to the Caucasus during the Armenian massacres of 1894-95. Kozikian was a twenty year old worker who had been politicized when very young and had already been a member of the Revolutionary Hunchak Party. Haik Pilossian, also known as Atamyan, had also been born in Turkey and was a close friend and comrade of Kozikian. Achot Khoumerian was a worker born in Tbilisi who had been one of the founders of the Association of Revolutionary Armenian Workers close to the Hunchaks and had written the first May Day leaflet in Armenian. Assadour Kakhoyan, also known as Kecho, had been politicized in the Caucasian workers' movement and had written the history of the first strike in Armenia.<sup>62</sup>

The small Marxist Armenian Workers' Group was not an isolated Armenian organization, and had close ties

Istanbul. p. 24

60 Nalbandian, Louise. "The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party 1887-1896"

61 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)". İletişim. 1992. Istanbul. p. 24-25

62 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Le mouvement révolutionnaire arménien, 1890-1903" Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique. Vol. 14 N°4. pp. 536-607. 1973. p. 581, 595-597, 599 For Achot Khoumerian also look at: Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)". İletişim. 1992. Istanbul. p. 48

to Georgian revolutionary workers in Tbilisi. It also participated in strikes in the leather and shoe factories where the Armenian workers were numerous.<sup>63</sup> In the years 1900-1 the Group put out an illegal publication called *Banvor* ('Worker'), which makes it possible for us to see its political line. *Banvor*, published under the slogan "Workers of all countries, unite!", declared itself to be the publication of the Armenian socialist workers. Both the Dashnaks and the Hunchaks were very strongly criticized for isolating the Armenian working class by a nationalist approach and it was emphasized that only the working class was capable of solving the Armenian question, putting forward the idea of a common struggle of the workers of all nationalities in the Caucasus. On this basis, we can say that this small yet efficient group was the first Armenian socialist organization to be free of nationalist influences and fully committed to the principles of proletarian internationalism.<sup>64</sup> In 1901, the forces of the state launched attacks against it and destroyed the organization, imprisoning many important militants. However the Armenian marxist left did not disappear completely.

The appearance of this internationalist organization in the Caucasus meant that the political destinies of the militants in the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group were to be deeply influenced by the Caucasian socialist movement, and indirectly the Russian socialist movement. Stepan Shaumian, the future leader of the Baku Commune of 1918, who was to be massacred among the rest of the revolutionaries in this city, was at the centre of these influences. Shaumian was an Armenian born in the same year as Karekin Kozikian in 1878. As a young man, a student member of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, he returned to his home town of Tbilisi after being expelled from the Polytechnic Institute of Riga. He had joined the Russian Party in 1900 when he was still in Riga. A few months after he arrived in Tbilisi, Shaumian formed the League of Armenian Social Democrats with former militants of the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group such as Melik Melikian, Achot Khoumerian and Assadour Kakhoyan. The new organization explained the positions it defended in a manifesto published in its publication, *Proletaryat*:

*"In its activities, the League of Armenian Social-Democrats, as one of the branches of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party which extends the network of its organizations far and wide over the entire expanse of Russia, is in complete accord with the RSDLP., and will fight together with it for the interests of the Russian proletariat in general, and of the Armenian proletariat in particular (...)"*

63 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)". İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 47

64 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Le mouvement révolutionnaire arménien, 1890-1903" *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*. Vol. 14 N°4. pp. 536-607. 1973. p. 597

*The attainment of the socialist ideal is, in our opinion, conceivable neither through the working class' efforts in the economic sphere nor through partial political and social reforms; it is possible only by completely smashing the entire existing system, by means of a social revolution, to which the political dictatorship of the proletariat must be the necessary prologue. (...)*

*Taking into consideration that the Russian state is made up of many different nationalities at varying levels of cultural development, and believing that only the extensive development of local self-government can safeguard the interests of these heterogeneous elements, we deem essential the establishment of a federative republic in the future free Russia. As to the Caucasus, in view of the extremely diverse national composition of its population, we shall strive to unite all the local socialist elements and all the workers of the various nationalities; we shall strive to create a united and strong Social-Democratic organization (...) [T]aking into account the above-mentioned diverse national composition of the Caucasus and the absence of geographical boundaries between the various nationalities, we do not find it possible to include in our program the demand for political autonomy for the Caucasian peoples."*<sup>65</sup>

Only one issue of this militantly internationalist publication was ever published, however the views expressed by the organization drew the attention of one of the leaders of the young generation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in exile, Vladimir Lenin. Writing in the 33rd issue of *Iskra* in February 1903, Lenin evaluated the positions of the League of Armenian Social Democrats, congratulating the organization for developing a correct attitude on the national question. However, he was opposed to the federalist demand expressed in the manifesto:

*"[I]s it possible from the Armenian Social-Democrats' point of view to speak of the demand for a federative republic? Federation presupposes autonomous national political units, whereas the League rejects the demand for national autonomy. To be fully consistent, the League should delete the demand for a federative republic from its program (...) It is not the business of the proletariat to preach federalism and national autonomy; it is not the business of the proletariat to advance such demands, which inevitably amount to a demand for the establishment of an autonomous class state. It is the business of the proletariat to rally the greatest possible masses of workers of each and every nationality more closely, to rally them for struggle in the broadest possible arena."*<sup>66</sup>

As a separate organization, the League of Armenian

65 <http://marxistsfr.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/feb/01b.htm>

66 <http://marxistsfr.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/feb/01b.htm>

Social Democrats was to be short-lived. The internationalist Armenian left in the Caucasus was rapidly reaching the conclusion that a common organization of all the socialists in the Caucasus was needed rather than an explicitly Armenian one. On this basis, in March 1903 the League joined the Caucasus Organization of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, which was made up of the editorial committee of *Brztola* (Struggle) of the Georgian marxists and Proletaryat as well as the party committees in Tbilisi, Baku and Batumi. The united organization started publishing *Proletari Krive* (Proletarian Struggle), a new publication in Georgian, Armenian and Russian. Following the Menshevik/Bolshevik split in the RSDLP in August 1903, prominent militants of the old League of Armenian Social Democrats such as Melik Melikian, Achot Khoumerian and Assadour Kakhoyan were led by Shaumian to become some of the first Armenian Bolsheviks.<sup>67</sup> Other leaders of the old League such as Arshak Zubarian, who was to become a deputy in the Duma, and Aramayis Erzinkian, sided with Menshevism.<sup>68</sup>

The Caucasian Gevorg Gharadjian, one of the leaders of the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group who had not been involved in the League of Armenian Social Democrats due to his arrest in 1902, was undecided between Menshevism and Bolshevism,<sup>69</sup> but following his release from prison he was to have a serious influence on developments inside the Revolutionary Hunchak Party. Gharadjian began to argue strongly that members of the Party in the Caucasus should join the RSDLP.<sup>70</sup> Following the increase in state repression against Armenians in the Caucasus after 1903 the Hunchak Party had been growing rapidly.<sup>71</sup> As the class struggle intensified a left wing emerged within the Party arguing that the members in the Caucasus should join the RSDLP while the party continued the struggle in the Ottoman Empire. The leaders of this left wing were none other than those who had been among the Party's founders such as Avetis Nazarbekian, Mariam Vardanian and Ruben Khan-Azat. The conservative faction was led by an Armenian militant called Stepan Sapah-Gulian, born in Nakhchivan yet active in Turkey. After the factional struggle intensified between 1903 and 1905, the two sides finally confronted each other at the congress held in Paris in 1905. The

conservatives led by Sapah-Gulian had the upper hand and stressed the unity of the Hunchak Party. However, on returning from the congress, the Caucasus-based left wing declared that it did not recognize the congress decisions and entered the RSDLP. Like Gharadjian, leaders such as Nazarbekian, Vardanian and Khan-Azat, did not side with either the Mensheviks or the Bolsheviks and adopted only the program of the RSDLP. But some Hunchak organizations in cities like Yerevan and Baku joined the Bolsheviks.<sup>72</sup>

The internationalist attitude adopted by a great majority of the Armenian socialists of the Caucasus was determined on the basis of the interests of both the Armenian workers in the region as well as those of the proletariat in the Caucasus in general. On the other hand, the Armenian socialists in the Caucasus held the view that the liberation of the Ottoman Armenians could only take place through a revolution in Russia and in some cases came close to completely rejecting the need for any political work in the Ottoman Empire at all. Such an attitude was far from being adequate or convincing either for Armenian socialists in the Ottoman Empire or for those in the Caucasus who had come from the Ottoman Empire and still had ties there. The faction led by Nazarbekian among the Hunchaks was clearly on the left, yet Sapah-Gulian and his comrades weren't actually very far on Nazarbekian's right – developments in class struggle had pulled the Hunchaks as a whole to the left.<sup>73</sup> The decision taken by Sapah-Gulian and his supporters in the 1905 congress was expressed as “realizing proletarian revolutionary activities in the Caucasus and struggling to form a political democracy based on marxist principles in Turkey”.<sup>74</sup> The congress also added ‘social democrat’ to the party name. After a final change of name at the 1909 congress held in Constantinople, the organization was known as the Social Democrat Hunchak Party.<sup>75</sup>

In the Caucasus a new socialist organization more interested in the problems of the Ottoman Armenians emerged. The Social Democratic Armenian Workers' Organization was formed in 1903 by a mixed bunch, some coming from Caucasian Hunchak organizations and others, possibly a majority, who had been introduced to marxism as students in Europe through

67 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 49

68 Ibid, p. 59

69 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü”. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik” Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 234

70 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Le mouvement révolutionnaire arménien, 1890-1903” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*. Vol. 14 N°4. pp. 536-607. 1973. p. 599

71 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 53

72 Ibid, p. 62-63

73 Even the Dashnaks shifted left. The Dashnak Party was to declare its adoption of socialism at its 1907 congress and despite the protests of all the Caucasian social democrats was to apply for membership of the Second International and be accepted. Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 72-73

74 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 63

75 Turabian, Hagop. “The Armenian Social-Democratic Hentchakist Party Part 1”. *Ararat* No. 34. Nisan 1916. Londra.  
[http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical\\_turabian.html](http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_turabian.html)

the writings of Plekhanov and Kautsky. Although this organization was interested in Ottoman problems, seeing itself as an internationalist organization and being especially critical of the nationalism of the Dashnaks, it was primarily a reaction against the internationalism of the Caucasian socialists. It was not on the right wing of the Caucasian movement alone: it also openly proclaimed the influence on its ideology of right wing tendencies in international social democracy such as the Jewish Bund and the Austrian marxists. On the national question, the organization's position was essentially right wing, emphasizing national differences rather than the common interests of workers from different nationalities. The demand of the Social Democratic Armenian Workers' Organization to be recognized as the sole representative of the Armenian proletariat was received coldly by the Caucasian social democrats; the organization never became as large as the Jewish Bund which so inspired it, and it remained a fairly insignificant right-socialist tendency in a land where workers' struggles created a strong tendency towards class unity.<sup>76</sup> The most significant work directed towards Armenian social democracy in the Ottoman Empire was to be done by Armenian socialists in the Caucasus who had emigrated from the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, the development of the socialist movement in the west of the Ottoman Empire, in Macedonia and Bulgaria, was taking a course similar to its counterpart in the east. At the turn of the century, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party was shaken by intense debates on the national question generally, and specifically on the Macedonian movement. Blagoev, leader of the BSDWP, had started putting forward the line that nations and nationalities were temporary bourgeois concepts which were destined to vanish as the capitalist system became more widespread. The conciliatory right wing of the BSDWP had, since 1900, existed as a sort of a faction within the party, around the publication *Obshto Delo* ('The Common Cause') edited by Yanko Sakazov. Sankov was the founder of the Union of Bulgarian Social Democrats with which Blagoev's Bulgarian Social Democratic Party had merged in 1894. In 1901 Gavril Georgiav, a militant of the Bulgarian party close to Blagoev, in an article published in the official organ of the party, *Rabotnicheski Vestnik* (Workers Paper), had accused those party members focusing on petty-bourgeois activity such as the Macedonian struggle of neglecting their duties to the proletariat. Dimo Hadjidimov, a member of both the Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia and Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, as the voice of the right wing of the party in *Obshto Delo* led protests against Georgiev.<sup>77</sup>

76 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)". İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 54-55

77 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve

The Bulgarian Party, and consequently the Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia, were rapidly heading for a split. The most concrete reflection of the issue at the core of the split was the question of Macedonia, with many debates and clashes between the left and right wings developing over this issue. A ban by the central committee of the BSDWP on its members joining Macedonian nationalist organizations was a serious blow against the right wing. But the issue wasn't just about the approach towards the national question in Macedonia. The left wing led by Blagoev was very strictly against any compromises with the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois elements and held the view that only proletarian struggles must be defended. The right wing led by Sakazov thought that the party should be based not only on the working class but on other social classes as well. The right wing had no problem with the idea of cooperating with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois tendencies. The left wing and the right wing also had different concepts of organization: the Bulgarian left had an approach similar to that of the Bolsheviks, in favor of building a narrow party of cadres, whereas Sakazov's right wing favored building a broad mass party. All these differences resulted in a split at the 10th Party Congress of 1903. From now on, the organization of Blagoev and his comrades was called the (Narrow) Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party and the organization of Sakazov and his supporters the (Broad) Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party. This split made the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists among the first in the international socialist movement, together with the Bolsheviks, to form a separate organization of the lefts.

The split in the Bulgarian party broke up the Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia. The one leader of the Broad Socialists in Macedonia was Dimo Hadjidimov. Under his leadership, members of the (Broad) Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party started conducting their activities entirely within the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, and made contacts with the left wing of this organization.<sup>78</sup> As for the Narrow Socialists, the Ilinden uprising of 1903 caused them to fully clarify their opinions on the Macedonian issue and the national question. In an article published in *Rabotnicheski Vestnik* in September 1903, they defended the view that the liberation of Macedonia could only be realized by the working class, and consequently an uprising could only be successful if led by the working class.<sup>79</sup>

Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik". Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 45

78 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik". Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 54

79 Ibid, p. 53



Vasil Glavinov, who had created the first socialist organization in the country, was now the most prominent leader of the Narrow Socialists in Macedonia. Especially after 1903, any member of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization had to give up their membership in order to join the Narrow Socialists led by Vasil Glavinov who was totally against Macedonian nationalism and defended proletarian internationalism. The Macedonian Narrow Socialists now took the name Social Democratic Workers' Organization of Macedonia and Adrianople,<sup>80</sup> with the aim of starting discussions in order to determine what sort of political practice was to be followed in the coming period. This was the first organization of the left wing of international social democracy within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>81</sup>

### The rise of the Young Turks and the attitude of the Socialists

On 21st May 1889 five students at the Military Medicine University of Constantinople met in complete secrecy in order to do something about a matter they deemed extremely important. Their names were Ishak Sukuti, Ibrahim Temo, Abdullah Cevdet, Mehmed Resid and Hikmet Emin. They were not to be as successful at writing their names into the pages of history as they may have hoped when they met that day. Nevertheless, the tradition they started was to live on for a long time. For that day they laid the foundations of the Society of Union and Progress. In fact the name of the secret organization they founded to topple Sultan Abdulhamit II was the Society for Ottoman Unity but six years later this was to merge with the anti-Abdulhamit organization led by the one-time national education manager in the city of Bursa, Ahmet Riza, and took the name which has gone down in history.

The Society of Union and Progress, which regarded itself as the bearer of the Ottomanist ideology of the past and as a liberal and Ottoman nationalist organization, was, at the time it appeared, only one among many similar organizations which were appearing in the Ottoman military and state bureaucracy and were in general called the Young Turks. Also influenced and impressed by the struggle of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, the Young Turk movement began to grow rapidly after 1895. Finally, a congress was held to bring together all elements within Young Turks movement. Known by different names such as the 1st Young Turk Congress, the Ottoman Freedom Congress, the Ottoman Liberal Congress and so on, this brought together different Young Turk organizations with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Vergazmiya Hunchak Party, and certain Greek and Bulgarian nationalist groups. It resulted in a division within the Young Turk movement over the question of minorities,

and especially about the Armenian question. The liberal Young Turk faction led by the sultan's nephew, Prince Sabahattin, together with the Greek and Albanian delegates, declared themselves in support of an end to the suffering of the Armenians and emphasized that they were correct to call for European aid to ensure their peace and security. At this point the supporters of Prince Sabahattin's views had a large majority among the Young Turks. However, there was a minority opposed to this approach led by Ahmet Riza, chairman of the Paris section of the Society of Union and Progress.<sup>82</sup>

Following the 1902 Congress, the majority group under the leadership of Prince Sabahattin began to plot a coup d'état supported by the West. But the failure of this attempt in 1903 led to the collapse of the majority group and the rise to prominence of the Society of Union and Progress led by Hasan Riza. The Society was a creature with a body inside the Ottoman Empire but its head was in Europe. It too was divided internally: Ahmet Riza held that change in the Ottoman Empire had to come peacefully whereas the group led by Bahattin Sakir, private doctor to crown prince Yusuf Izzetin, thought that change was only be possible if Sultan Abdulhamit was overthrown. The Society accelerated its work with a publication founded in Egypt by Bahattin Sakir called *Shura-yi Ummet* (The Council of the Community). However in 1905 this publication was shut down and Bahattin Sakir went to Paris in order to try to make the section there more radical and centralized.<sup>83</sup> In 1906 a postal manager in Thessaloniki (at this time still a part of the Ottoman Empire) called Mehmet Talat, who was to become better known as Talat Pasha, formed the Ottoman Freedom Society and made contact with the Young Turk movement. The Ottoman Freedom Society managed to gain considerable support among the state bureaucracy in the region, and also in the army, thanks to the influence of a military officer by the name of Ahmet Cemal, better known as Cemal Pasha. Meanwhile Prince Sabahattin was back in the game, forming an organization called the Decentralization and Private Enterprise Society in 1906. In Egypt, an organization called the Ottoman Constitution Society was formed. All these organizations came together on December 22nd 1907 in Paris, at a meeting known as the 2nd Young Turk Congress. The Society of Union and Progress imposed criteria for participation that included conditions such as respecting the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and rejecting the external aid, as discussed in the previous congress. The 2nd Congress resulted in the unification of the

<sup>80</sup> Now the Turkish city of Edirne

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 54

<sup>82</sup> Karasandık, Özlem. "Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Ermeni Hınçak Cemiyeti'nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Siyasi Faaliyetleri (1887–1908)". Mersin Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü. 2005. Mersin. p. 93

<sup>83</sup> Uzun, Cem. "Osmanlı Muhalefet Partileri". [http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/84\\_ksdden\\_osmanli-muh-isyan.htm](http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/84_ksdden_osmanli-muh-isyan.htm)

movement under the banner of Union and Progress.<sup>84</sup> However, the main force behind the gathering was not the organizations within the Young Turk movement but the Western Bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Dashnaks, and the Congress consequently produced a solid alliance between the Young Turk movement and the Dashnaks.<sup>85</sup>

Beyond doubt the Society of Union and Progress and the overwhelming majority of the Young Turk movement constituted a serious and substantial nationalist movement. It is possible to say that this movement represented the interests and the politics of weak Muslim private capital in the Ottoman Empire around the views of Prince Sabahattin and his followers. But despite the fact that their perspective had majority support at one point it did not remain influential within the Young Turk movement for long. So what was the class basis of the Young Turk movement? The most lucid analysis was made by Christian Rakovsky, then one of the leading revolutionaries in the Balkans, who was close to the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists:

*“Indeed what is the social character of the Young Turk movement? The Turkish workers and the country people are still under the influence of the clergy. The Muslim bourgeoisie, among which the Young Turks have some sympathy, does not have much importance. A long historical evolution has transformed the Turkish bourgeoisie into a military and civil service caste while the Christian bourgeoisie deals with industry and commerce.”*<sup>86</sup>

The Young Turks were a movement of the radical nationalist Turkish bourgeoisie in the upper and middle layers of the Ottoman state and army, and following the 2nd Young Turk Congress the Society of Union and Progress became the class party of the Turkish bourgeoisie. The ideology of the Young Turks also expressed this class characteristic. After all, it was a typical liberal nationalist movement; Sultan Abdulhamid was 'ruining the country', he was 'unable to protect the territorial integrity of the empire', and it was thus necessary to 'liberate the fatherland from his yoke'. The Turkish bourgeoisie, mainly born and raised within the state and the army, were increasingly uneasy about the political repression and limitations imposed by the Sultan. At the end of the day, it couldn't be said that this situation was really extraordinary.

On the other hand, why was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation – which claimed to be socialist at this time and in fact was a member of the Second International when it participated in the 2nd Young Turk Congress – cooperating with the Young Turks? Was this simply the opportunism of a typical party of the Second International or was there something beyond that? If we take into consideration their foundation process, the Dashnaks' decision to adopt socialism was based on pragmatism. In reality Dashnaks rejected class struggle even in the Caucasus, where it was very intense. Pointing to the Armenian nation's dispersal and its numerical weakness confronted with the number of forces against it, they argued that all classes of the Armenian society had to act together in the period they termed the first stage of the national liberation struggle.<sup>87</sup> But when their hopes of the big European powers coming to the Armenians' aid fell to the ground, gaining the support of the European social-democratic movement, which was increasingly becoming a significant force, could seem like a reasonable strategy. So although they emphasized over and over again that socialism was out of the question in Armenia, after 1894 the Dashnaks started translating certain socialist publications and in 1896 made contact with the Second International.<sup>88</sup> Although there were certain militants among the Dashnaks who defended socialist ideas, and even though a pretty much intransigent socialist faction called the Young Dashnaks emerged, the Dashnaks did not adopt a program which had anything to do with socialism for Armenia until 1907 when they applied for the membership of the II<sup>nd</sup> International. In the program adopted in 1907, the Dashnaks described how complicated class struggle was in countries with minorities, arguing that the workers of oppressed nations should be concerned with their own national cultures and emphasizing that nations would exist in a socialist society of the future.<sup>89</sup> The concept of socialism defended by the Dashnaks after this point was based on a wide theoretical spectrum somewhere to the right of the center of social democracy, ranging from the influence of Italian left nationalists like Mazzini and Garibaldi to the Russian Narodnik tradition, and from Bernstein and Jaurès to Kautsky. In the end, the most significant influence was to be the socialism of Jaurès, committed to nations, fatherlands and democracy.<sup>90</sup> The national program of the Dashnaks was also changing, now defending political democracy for Turkish Armenia based on local autonomy and federative ties with the Ottoman Empire rather than national liberation.<sup>91</sup>

84 “Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma.” Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1820

85 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “1876–1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü”. “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik” Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 212–213

86 Rakovsky, Christian. “The Turkish Revolution”. *Le Socialisme*, Paris No.37, 1 August 1908. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/rakovsky/1908/08/01.htm>

87 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. “Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm (1887-1912)”. İletişim. 1992. İstanbul. p. 53

88 Ibid, p. 28-29

89 Ibid, p. 72

90 Ibid, p. 74

91 Ibid, p. 72

All internationalist Armenian socialists agreed that the Dashnaks were nothing more than a bourgeois nationalist organization using socialist slogans for their national purposes. Without a doubt, however, some Dashnak militants had started to be influenced by socialist ideas and some in fact had been convinced of socialism from the beginning. However, the attitude of this party towards class struggle had turned it into a structure within which, both in the Caucasus and in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian petty-bourgeoisie was very prominent, and the more dissident and radical sections of the Armenian bourgeoisie was present. Were the Dashnaks acting in the interests of the Armenian working class or the Armenian bourgeoisie when they made their alliance with the Young Turks in 1907? The genocide that Union and Progress was to perpetrate shortly after taking power was to prove that the Armenian working class had nothing to gain from any alliance with the Young Turks and the Turkish bourgeoisie. What lay behind the Dashnak-Young Turk alliance were the interests of the Armenian bourgeoisie. Indeed, there were many serious historic parallels between the section of the Armenian bourgeoisie within the Dashnaks and the Turkish bourgeoisie expressed by the Young Turks. Just like the Turkish bourgeoisie, the prominent radical Armenian bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie among the Armenian community had no official or political privileges. The monarchy held political power throughout the country, and official and political power remained in the hands of the clergy, who were unaffected by the Sultan's power. Essentially, the political interests of the radical Turkish bourgeoisie and the radical Armenian bourgeoisie – and more generally of the Ottoman state and military bourgeoisie and of the Ottoman industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie – demanded their cooperation. If we analyse the leadership of the Dashnaks we have to say that if a single atom could be called socialist prior to December 1907, that atom died when the leaders of the organization sat together to cooperate with Union and Progress. Their alliance with Union and Progress was to irreversibly transform the Dashnaks into a movement playing big games in the interests of the Armenian bourgeoisie.

This was the situation of the political representatives of the Ottoman bourgeoisie before the overthrow of Sultan Abdulhamit II. However, the Ottoman bourgeoisie was not the sole force behind the 1908 mutiny. Since the turn of the century, workers' struggles were becoming more and more important in the Empire and were to have a significant influence on the process leading up to 1908. Despite the repression of the Abdulhamit era the working class launched a series of strikes from 1902, which increased especially between 1904 and 1906 under the influence of the international class struggle. Strikes by thousands of workers took place in Ottoman cities such as Kavala, Bitola, Edessa, Skopje and Adrianople. It was no surprise that this strike wave should take place in the

European lands of the Ottoman Empire, since these were in many ways the most developed part of the whole Empire, and both the Union and Progress movement of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and non-Muslim capital and its organizations were quite strong in this relatively industrialized region. Rather than being a sudden explosion, this strike wave was the result of an accumulation of discontent due to thirty years of the repressive Abdulhamit regime, hard and miserable economic conditions, and the problems of agricultural production, as well as numerous desperate appeals to the authorities which had had no effect.<sup>92</sup> The most basic reason for the strikes was the inability of the state and private enterprises to pay workers their wages due to economic difficulties. The interesting yet nevertheless unsurprising aspect of these strikes was the fact that they were as significant in the public sector as the private sector; workers in the public sector going on strike was a very clear demonstration of the class nature of the Ottoman state.<sup>93</sup>

While we cannot consider the strikes that took place between 1902 and 1908 as the main reason for the 1908 mutiny, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Ottoman bourgeoisie would not have had the courage to act against the regime of Abdulhamit II had this strike-wave not taken place. Every single one of these strikes in the six year period following 1902 was a strong blow against the Abdulhamit regime, weakening its image. Most significantly, these strikes demonstrated that the Abdulhamit regime, which had managed to suppress class struggle for sixteen years and keep the workers in a pacified state, was no longer able to control the proletariat. Despite all his threats, means of oppression and ruthlessness, Abdulhamit was unable to prevent the working class from struggling. These strikes constitute the most important factor in understanding how the 1908 mutiny was possible. The working class did not overthrow Abdulhamit, but it was with the reappearance of the class struggles in 1902 that his regime began to crack. Thus the first blow against the regime was struck by the working class itself.

Before 1908 Ottoman socialism generally had a different attitude towards the Young Turks than the Dashnaks. The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization<sup>94</sup> in the Western territories of the Empire or the Hunchak Social Democrat Party, the main Armenian socialist party active in the Empire, were not close enough to the Young Turks to start cooperating or

92 "Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1813

93 "Tanzimat ve Batılılaşma." Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1814

94 This group, made up of IMRO's own left wing and the supporters of the (Broad) BSDWP, was joined by supporters of the faction called the "Anarcho-Liberals" who split from the (Narrow) BSDWP in 1905.

negotiating with them, although they were coming closer. But the left wing of the Ottoman socialist movement in both the west and the east kept a greater distance. The Union of Revolutionary Social Democrats of Macedonia led by Glavinov had put a considerable distance between themselves and the Young Turks following the Cretan crisis in 1897. In 1898 Glavinov had published an article in *Politicheska Svoboda* about the attitude of the Young Turks towards the question of Crete. Glavinov vigorously criticized the Young Turks' defense of Turkish nationalism, pointing out that they were in fact in favor of national oppression and Ottoman domination of minorities.<sup>95</sup> For the Narrow Socialist tradition, which had resolved not to work with any bourgeois or petty-bourgeois tendency, including nationalists of oppressed nations such as the IMRO in Macedonia, it was unthinkable to develop any relations with the Young Turks. The Social Democratic Workers' Organization of Macedonia and Adrianople, founded in 1905 on the same lines as the (Narrow) BSDWP, maintained the same attitude towards the Young Turks, although they were to be target of heavy repression in the process leading up to the overthrow of the Sultan.<sup>96</sup>

The left wing of the Armenian socialist movement focused on the Ottoman Empire had regrouped around the paper *Yerkri Tzayn* ('The Voice of the Country'), which was started in Tbilisi in 1906. This brought together elements from all the socialist Armenian organizations, from the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group to the Hunchak Social Democrat Party, and the Social Democratic Armenian Workers' Organization to the Young Dashnaks. The founder of the paper, Tigran Zaven, had good relations both with the more radical members of the Dashnaks and the Hunchak Social Democrat Party. One of leading theoreticians of the Social Democratic Armenian Workers' Organization, Bakhshi Ishkanian, was among the contributors to *Yerkri Tzayn*. Karekin Kozikian, one of the founders of the Marxist Armenian Workers' Group, also worked on the new publication after bringing out a publication called *Banvor* (Worker) in Switzerland which criticized both the Dashnak and the Hunchak parties. While it had not elaborated its position on the Ottoman Empire very clearly, despite its nationalistic-sounding name, *Yerkri Tzayn*, defended a clearly internationalist approach:

*"What divides the two peoples? We are all crushed under the feet of the same tyrant. We feel sorrow for*

*the same misfortunes. Look around you. With its strict prejudices, deep ignorance and endless poverty and misery, the Turkish people in Turkey, Iran and Russia is in the claws of the exploiters; these poor creatures covered in blood are suffering as much as the Armenian people. The Armenians of Turkey should not separate their own cause of liberation from that of others living under the same rule (...) There is only one possibility in Turkey: A Great Revolution (...) This regime enslaving the Armenians and the Turks, the Kurds and the Assyrians, the Yazidi and the Druze, the Greeks and the Jews, the Arabs and the Albanians and the Macedonians should be overthrown by the united force of all these peoples".*<sup>97</sup>

From the beginning of 1907 this circle started to put forward clearer views. The internationalism of *Yerkri Tzayn* was based on the working class and no matter how hard the movements of other classes tried to portray themselves as revolutionaries, the paper saw it as its duty to oppose any cooperation with them. Its attitude towards the Young Turk movement was shaped by this approach:

*"We do not want to speak for 'the Armenian Nation', because in our opinion what divides peoples is not races or languages but classes; social, economical and political categories. There are no Armenians and there are no Turks. There are only the oppressors and the oppressed; the exploiters and the exploited (...) What should our attitude towards the Young Turks be? Putting themselves forward as a liberal class, we can have no relations whatsoever with them (...) A true bond can only be formed with the Turkish people (...) If they form a political party not just of the 'Muslim Nation' but of all the oppressed (...) Only then can the Armenians and the Turks create a class party together".*<sup>98</sup>

While *Yerkri Tzayn* was centered in Tbilisi, its content was directed towards the Ottoman Empire. It published biographies and harsh criticisms of the leading Young Turks of the time such as Prince Sabahattin, Ahmet Riza, Abdullah Cevdet et al.<sup>99</sup> The paper was distributed in cities of the Empire with high Armenian populations, most significantly in Van, and articles were printed and distributed as thousands of leaflets in Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish in the region. The ideas defended by *Yerkri Tzayn* strongly influenced Dashnak militants in the months before their leaders began their negotiations with Union and Progress in Paris,<sup>100</sup> as shown by the following leaflet published by

95 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 57

96 Yalimov, İbrahim. "1876–1923 Döneminde Türkiye'de Bulgar Azınlığı ve Sosyalist Hareketin Gelişmesi". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 143

97 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876–1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 209

98 Ibid, p. 209-210

99 Ibid, p. 208

100 Ibid, p. 210



militants of the Dashnak party in the region which even reveals a similarity in language:

*"We believe it is time for all to understand who we are and who our opponents and enemies are. By saying 'We', we are not talking about the 'Dashnaks' or other Armenian revolutionary parties, but all in the Ottoman Empire living under the destruction, pillaging and oppression of the tyrannical government, we are talking about all the Ottomans, that is the Turks, the Armenians, the Albanians, the Arabs, the Greeks, the Assyrians and so forth. (...)*

*Those who walk under our banners, regardless of nationality or religion, are those who want freedom and equality, who hate the tyrannical government, those who want to liberate all the peoples from slavery, pillaging and oppression. We are freedom, wisdom, equality and justice. Our enemies are tyranny, ignorance, slavery, pillaging, injustice. We are the workers, we are the accursed of our country, we are those who raise the flames".<sup>101</sup>*

### The revolt of 1908

The Abdulhamid regime had been tottering since 1902. On July 3rd 1908 an eccentric military officer, Niyazi of Resen, who belonged to the Society of Union and Progress, 'went rogue' with the two hundred soldiers under his command and took to the mountains. In three weeks the mutiny in the Ottoman military had grown like an avalanche and the monarchy began to collapse. The spark turned into a fire that spread to almost all the Ottoman armed forces in Macedonia and to a significant section in the rest of the Empire. When he started the mutiny, Niyazi of Resen, the "partisan of the Ottoman fatherland" despite his Albanian ethnic background, had no idea that he had given birth to the tradition which was to take the Ottoman Empire to war, only to see it come to power under the name of Kemalism around the person of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the shadow of which still casts upon contemporary Turkey. Nor could he have, for during the 1908 mutiny Mustafa Kemal, whose name was to become so well known internationally in the following decades, was nothing more than a shadow behind another member of the Union and Progress in the Ottoman Army, who was busy watching events calmly from the balcony of his hotel in Thessaloniki; when news reached Ismail Enver of what Niyazi of Resen and his troops had done, judging the moment to be a fantastic opportunity for the overthrow of the Sultan - and of course for his own personal interests and ambitions - he started to spread the mutiny in the Ottoman armed forces. It is said that after the mutiny spread to Thessaloniki, the population stayed out in the streets all night. The following morning, 24th July, the news reached Thessaloniki that Sultan Abdulhamit II, unable to suppress the mutiny,

had declared a return to the constitutional regime.<sup>102</sup> The Young Turks had won. The slogan echoing in the streets of Ottoman cities was "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". In a few months Constantinople was to become "the most free city of the world".<sup>103</sup>



Enver Pasha

Or so thought the best-intentioned of the Young Turks, Dashnaks and others who actually believed in the regime known to history as the 2nd Constitutional Era. The eruption of massive struggles of the working class only a few weeks after July 24th proved that this was not to be the case. Undoubtedly, what had just happened was an event of great significance. But what exactly was it that had just taken place? Who had gained a victory between July 3rd and July 24th? What was the meaning of this event? It certainly had a tremendous importance for Ottoman socialism, and the left wing of Ottoman and Balkan socialism were among those who took the clearest position on the events. The most important leaders of the international socialist movement also felt the need to take a position on the Young Turk mutiny. The first to pose the question of the nature of the mutiny was Christian Rakvosky, in an article published a week after:

"[A]re we seeing a revolution or a military coup

<sup>101</sup> "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 19-20

<sup>102</sup> [http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/83\\_ksdden\\_1908-devrimi.htm](http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/83_ksdden_1908-devrimi.htm)

<sup>103</sup> Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 213

*without major consequences? The immediate future will tell. However, it seems that from its start the Turkish Revolution shows a very dangerous tendency to go off the rails.*

*It is incontrovertible that the only way of pacifying Turkey, torn by so many passions, is the greatest possible liberty. It is that which by satisfying the just claims of the different peoples of the empire, can unite them in a spirit of common solidarity. Unfortunately the power of the Young Turks is, from this point of view, totally inadequate. The 1876 constitution which they have demanded and got leaves a lot to be desired. It leaves the autocratic power of the Sultan almost intact.*

*On the other hand the Young Turks, doubtless struck by the state of decay in which they find the Empire, have only one thing in mind: to strengthen the central power as much as possible. Instead of an autocratic Sultan there would be a no less autocratic oligarchy. (...)*

*Thus the only milieu in which the Young Turks are popular is that of the army and bureaucracy. These two elements can guarantee to a revolution a success as swift as it is short-lived. But a clever maneuver of the Sultan, calling to power the greatest possible number of Young Turks, can disorganize and compromise the whole movement. The Young Turks could find solid support in the Christian bourgeoisie and proletariat but will they have the foresight and moral courage to do so?"<sup>104</sup>*

The questions Rakovsky posed were to be answered by events soon enough. It turned out that the Young Turks were not a movement which could easily be dispersed by a clever maneuver of the Sultan and that they were quite comfortable about working with the Christian bourgeoisie as long as they felt the need to, although not with the working class. The general attitude of Rakovsky was more or less upheld by the Narrow Socialist current he supported. Without the slightest doubt or illusion, from the outset the Narrow Socialists described the 1908 uprising as a military revolt.<sup>105</sup> In a pamphlet published in August Blagoev, leader of the Narrow Socialists, clearly argued for the importance of protecting the proletariat against bourgeois and petty bourgeois influences and condemned those socialists who were running to Macedonia to support the Young Turks when this was more necessary than ever before. Blagoev was not just against the Young Turks but also strongly critical of their supporters who were "masquerading as socialists". Far from preaching

passivity or non-involvement he urged his comrades within the Ottoman borders to involve themselves in the strikes.<sup>106</sup> The 15th General Congress of the (Narrow) BSDWP from 2nd to 5th August evaluated the situation with the same clarity:

*"The Congress of the (Narrow) BSDWP (...) wishes the proletariat of Turkey to continue its fight to abolish the monarchist regime completely and for the full emancipation of the proletariat of Turkey and to obtain a total victory in this fight. The proletariat of Turkey can reach total freedom only with its own class organ, under the banner of socialism and fighting shoulder to shoulder together with the forces of the international social democracy".<sup>107</sup>*

The leaders of the left wing of the international socialist movement also made important analyses of the 1908 mutiny and later developments. In an article written in October 1908, Lenin described what had happened in the Ottoman Empire as a democratic bourgeois revolution. However, it couldn't be said that he was supportive of the Young Turk movement or had illusions about it:

*"Rivalry among the capitalist powers, anxious to 'bite off' as big a piece as they can and extend their possessions and colonies, coupled with fear of an independent democratic movement among the nations dependent on or 'protected' by Europe - these are two mainsprings of all European policy. The Young Turks are praised for their moderation and restraint, i.e., the Turkish revolution is being praised because it is weak, because it is not rousing the popular masses to really independent action, because it is hostile to the proletarian struggle beginning in the Ottoman Empire"<sup>108</sup>*

Another who commented on these events was Trotsky. While his position did not really differ from Lenin's, one important point he made was the similarity between 1908 in Turkey and 1905 in Russia, and especially after the eruption of the mass strike, seeing a continuity between the two. Among the leaders of the international socialist movement, Trotsky was the one who put the most emphasis on the working class movement in the Ottoman Empire. In an article written in December 1908, he argued as follows:

106 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 59

107 Yalımov, İbrahim. "1876-1923 Döneminde Türkiye'de Bulgar Azınlığı ve Sosyalist Hareketin Gelişmesi". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 137-138

108 Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. "Events in the Balkans and in Persia". Proletary No. 37, October 16 (29), 1908. <http://marxistsfr.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/oct/16.htm>

104 Rakovsky, Christian. "The Turkish Revolution". *Le Socialisme*, Paris No.37, 1 August 1908. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/rakovsky/1908/08/01.htm>

105 Yalımov, İbrahim. "1876-1923 Döneminde Türkiye'de Bulgar Azınlığı ve Sosyalist Hareketin Gelişmesi". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 135

*“The Russian revolution has been echoed far from Russia’s borders. In Western Europe it has provoked a turbulent proletarian movement. But it has also drawn the countries of Asia into political activity. In Persia, on the Caucasian frontier and under the direct influence of events in Russia, a revolutionary struggle has begun, and has continued in various forms for more than two years. In China and the Indies, everywhere the masses are rising against their own tyrants and their European despoilers (capitalists and missionaries). The most recent aftershock of the Russian revolution is the revolution which has taken place this summer in Turkey (...)*

*In Russia, the proletariat has been the main fighting force of the revolution. In Turkey, as I pointed out above, industry only existed in embryonic form, as a result the proletariat is weak and small in numbers (...) When the revolution broke out in July this year [1908], the Sultan immediately found himself without an army. Military units went over to the revolution one after the other. Doubtless, the ignorant soldiers did not understand the movement’s goals, but their discontent over living conditions led them to follow their officers. The latter peremptorily demanded a Constitution, threatening to overthrow the Sultan if one were not granted. Abdulhamit could only give in. He granted a Constitution (the Sultans always make this kind of gesture when they feel the point of a knife at their throats), formed a government made up of liberal personalities, and opened the way to parliamentary elections. The whole country was gripped by feverish activity. Meeting followed on meeting. New newspapers appeared in great numbers. As if awoken by a thunderclap, the young proletariat entered into movement. Strikes broke out and workers’ organizations were created. In Salonika, the first socialist paper was published.*

*As these lines are being written, the Turkish parliament has already met – with a majority of ‘Young Turk’ reformers. The future will soon show us what is to be the fate of this Turkish ‘Duma’.*”<sup>109</sup>

In 1909, Trotsky analyzed the 1908 events in the Ottoman Empire along the lines of his theory of permanent revolution:

*“By the tasks which it must achieve (economic independence, the unity of nation and state, and political freedoms), the Turkish revolution corresponds to the self determination of the bourgeois nation and in this sense points to its links with the traditions of the 1789 and 1848 revolutions. But the army, led by its officers, functioned like the executive body of the nation,*

*and that gave events from the start the planned character of military maneuvers. It would nevertheless be pure stupidity (and many people were guilty of this error) to see in the events in Turkey of last July a simple pronunciamiento and to treat them as similar to some other military-dynastic coup d’état in Serbia. The power of the Turkish officers and the secret of their success does not lie in a brilliantly organized plan or conspiratorial talents of diabolical skill, but the active sympathy shown to them by the most advanced classes in society: merchants, craftsmen, workmen, sections of the administration and of the clergy and finally masses in the countryside exemplified by the peasantry. But all these classes bring with them, not simply their “sympathy” but also their interests, their claims and their hopes. Their social aspirations, stifled for a long time, are now openly expressed while a Parliament provides them an arena to put them forward. Bitter disillusion awaits those who think that the Turkish revolution is already over. Among those who will be disappointed, will be not only Abdul Hamid but also it would seem the “Young Turk” Party. (...)*

*Turkish industry is, as we have said, very weak. Not only has the sultan’s regime undermined the economic foundations of the country, but it deliberately created obstacle to the construction of factories, motivated by a healthy fear of the proletariat. Nevertheless, it proved to be impossible to completely preserve the regime against this danger. The first weeks of the Turkish revolution were marked by strikes in the public bakeries, printing works, textiles, transport, the tobacco factories, the workers in the ports and the railwaymen. The boycott of Austrian goods should have mobilized and inspired the young proletariat of Turkey even more – especially the dockers – who played a decisive role in this campaign. But how did the new regime respond to the political birth of the working class? By a law imposing forced labor for a strike. The program of the “Young Turks” does not have a word concerning any precise measure to help the workers. And yet, to treat the Turkish proletariat as a ‘quantité négligeable’ means to run the risk of serious unexpected events. The importance of a class should never be evaluated simply by its numbers. The power of the contemporary proletariat, even when its number is small, rests on the fact that it holds in its hands the concentrated productive capacity of the country and the control of the most significant means of communication. The ‘Young Turk’ party will run up against this elementary fact of capitalist political economy and hard reality. (...) This is why I maintain that the military revolt in Macedonia of last July, which led to the calling of Parliament, was only the prologue to the revolution: the drama*

<sup>109</sup> Trotsky, Leon. “La révolution en Turquie et les tâches du prolétariat”. Pravda n° 2, 17 December 1908 <http://www.marxists.org/francais/trotsky/oeuvres/1908/12/081217.htm>

*is still before us.*"<sup>110</sup>

Significantly Trotsky's views on this question were the closest to the positions of the left wing of the Ottoman socialist movement. Like the Ottoman Narrow Socialists, although he used the term 'revolution' to describe the events, Trotsky too described the 1908 uprising as a military revolt. Although not as confidently and in fact rather shyly compared to the clarity of the Ottoman socialists, by pointing out the role and importance of the Ottoman Empire, and by describing July 1908 only as the 'prelude' of the revolution, Trotsky did express the possibility of a proletarian revolution in the Ottoman Empire. As for Rosa Luxemburg, while not describing the class nature of the Young Turk mutiny, writing the Junius Pamphlet in prison in 1915 she clearly identified the nature of the Young Turk movement, as well as its trajectory and its relationship with German imperialism:

*"In the first stage, while ideal considerations still predominated in the Young Turkish movement, when it was still fired with ambitious plans and illusions of a real springtime of life and of a rejuvenation for Turkey, its political sympathies were decidedly in favor of England. This country seemed to them to represent the ideal state of modern liberal rule, while Germany, which has so long played the role of protector of the holy regime of the old Sultan was felt to be its natural opponent. For a while it seemed as if the revolution of 1908 would mean the bankruptcy of German oriental policies. It seemed certain that the overthrow of Abdul Hamid would go hand in hand with the downfall of German influence. As the Young Turks assumed power, however, and showed their complete inability to carry out any modern industrial, social or national reform on a large scale, as the counterrevolutionary hoof became more and more apparent, they turned of necessity to the tried and proven methods of Abdul Hamid, which meant periodic bloody massacres of oppressed peoples, goaded on until they flew at each other's throats, boundless, truly oriental exploitation of the farming population became the foundation of the nation. The artificial restoration of rule by force again became the most important consideration for 'Young Turkey' and the traditional alliance of Abdul Hamid with Germany was re-established as the deciding factor in the foreign policy of Turkey."*<sup>111</sup>

As for the Second International and those sections of Ottoman socialism not on the left wing, they supported

the 1908 revolt enthusiastically, and without any noticeable criticisms. Thessalonian socialist Avram Benaroya, who had previously been a member of the (Narrow) BSDWP, now sided with the anarcho-liberal tendency and described the revolt in a very romanticized way:

*"For days and for weeks, the Sabri Pasha Avenue and the White Tower Gardens saw and heard nothing but flags, celebrations and songs of the liberation of Turkey. There was a common rhythm, a common motif in all everyone said: 30 million people suffered under the oppression of a despotic sultan and his 300 servants and agents for 33 years. 30 heroes raised the flag of the revolution and the sultan was overthrown; freedom had come. Turks and Christians; freedom for all. Now we are all brothers. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Turks, Albanians, Arabs, Greeks and Bulgarians, we are free citizens of the Ottoman motherland"*<sup>112</sup>

1908 divided the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization as well. The attitude of the right wing of the movement - basically an appendage of Bulgarian state interests within the Ottoman Empire - was determined by relations between the 'New' Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Since these were not really close, the right wing of the IMRO was to remain for the most part distanced from the Young Turks. The attitude of the left wing on the other hand, by this point shaped by the Broad Socialists and the anarcho-liberal tendency, was more sympathetic, and the Broad Socialists' leading representative in Macedonia, Dimo Hadjimov, declared himself in favour of the Young Turks. Yane Sandinski, the most prominent IMRO armed leader who was aligned with the left, led his partisans down from the mountains where they were to get their pictures taken with leading Young Turks, with Turkish flags behind them.<sup>113</sup>

Even the Hunchak Social Democrat Party, which was more distanced from the Young Turks than the IMRO left wing, changed the nature of its actions after 1908, deciding to abandon illegal work. The armed Hunchak partisan Hampartsum Boyacian, nicknamed Mourad the Great, leader of the Sason resistance of 1890, surrendered his arms and came to Constantinople in order to participate in the upcoming elections.<sup>114</sup> Even Sapah-Gulian, who was soon to conclude that this legalization was a huge mistake, made a speech in August 1908 in the Surp Yerrortutyun Armenian Church in Pera, Constantinople saying:

*"We the Hunchaks will cease all revolutionary*

<sup>112</sup> [http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/83\\_ksdden\\_1908-devrimi.htm](http://www.antikapitalist.net/makale/turkiye/83_ksdden_1908-devrimi.htm)

<sup>113</sup> Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. Istanbul. p. 65

<sup>114</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampartsoum\\_Boyadjian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampartsoum_Boyadjian)



*activities from now on and work for the progress of the fatherland with all our presence”.*<sup>115</sup>

As mentioned above, the Dashnaks were openly allies of the Young Turks, and consequently their support for the new regime was much stronger than that of the Hunchak Social Democrat Party which still had its doubts. The Dashnaks had more armed partisans than the Hunchaks and so the numbers of partisans laying down their arms and leaving the mountains for the cities, and Dashnak partisan leaders going directly from the mountains into the parliament were not negligible.<sup>116</sup> Arméne Aktoni, one of the leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, explained the Dashnak attitude towards Union and Progress as follows:

*“Among the most prominent duties of the Dashnaksutyun will be defending the Ottoman constitution, assuring the most successful mix of the Ottoman nations and cooperating with the Society of Union and Progress”.*<sup>117</sup>

And leading figures of the Society of Union and Progress were not at all cold in their attitude towards the Federation. Ahmet Rıza, chairman of the first Meclis-i Mebusan (Assembly of Deputies; the Ottoman Parliament), upon hearing that there were partisans among the new Armenian deputies, expressed his joy:

*“So wonderful! Our trusted friends are coming down from the mountains into the parliament in order to defend the establishments of the constitutional regime!”.*<sup>118</sup>

The trust of the right wing of Ottoman socialism in Union and Progress was to prove empty very shortly, and the left wing would be shown to be right. But before coming to that, we need to answer the following question: with the inevitable benefit of hindsight, what can we say happened in July 1908 in the Ottoman Empire? In a marxist sense, was the 1908 revolt a revolution or a coup d'état? We are of the opinion that the answer to this question goes beyond this dilemma. In the marxist sense, 1908 can neither be described and understood just as a revolution nor just as a coup d'état. Without a doubt, it is a fact that the revolt that took place in July 1908 was a mutiny, a military revolt led by officers. The officers who took power in 1908 were the same people, from the same Ottoman military tradition, as the rulers of the future Turkish state. Yet to conclude that 1908 was a coup d'état means ignoring all the struggles in the five years between 1908 and 1913 during which the Enver-Talat-Cemal Pashas' troika came to power. This also neglects the fact that

during the revolt officers and bureaucrats affiliated to Union and Progress acted as a part of the common struggle of other social forces. What is more, it simply forgets that the monarchy was deprived of supreme state power by a united front of the political representatives of the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie, and the military and bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which belonged to another class. And what made it possible for the bourgeoisie to act in 1908 was the fact that the class struggles of the previous period had weakened the old regime and created a suitable background for massive class struggles to erupt - even though these struggles were almost immediately confronted by all the sections and layers of the bourgeoisie.

1908 is a revolution, if we define a revolution as one class taking state power from another class. Nevertheless it is not possible to say that 1908 was a revolution in the marxist sense, in other words a social revolution: the social revolution had in effect already taken place. Contrary to Trotsky's argument, it is well known today that industry, the working class and class struggle had started developing in the era of Abdulhamit II and even before. Far from opposing economic development on the Western model, the Sultan's regime had enthusiastically supported such development due to the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire and its failure to compete with its rivals. Indeed, it was precisely the practice and dominance of such economic policies that had created such a powerful military and bureaucratic bourgeoisie within the Ottoman state, and out of necessity these policies had also created a sector of the working class that was employed by the Ottoman state. The idea that a political regime could prevent the development of the proletariat due to fear for its interests by means of willpower is absurd. Besides, by strictly opposing workers' strikes which were obviously not in the interests of the non-muslim bourgeoisie, the Abdulhamid regime, thus protected the interests of industry against the working class. So 1908 did not happen because of the contradiction between the economic interests of the bourgeoisie and the monarchy, with the bourgeoisie wanting to overcome the obstacle posed by the monarchy in order to shape the economic structure of the country and thus necessarily reshape the state - as was the case with the bourgeois revolutions of 1789-1848 in Europe. Although it was ruled by a monarchy at the top, the Ottoman state, in its structure and functioning, was already a capitalist state by 1908. Consequently what was in question was the determination of who was to sit in its top layer in a way consistent with the existing general structure. The bourgeoisie's steps against the Abdulhamit regime developed in reaction to its repression in the political and cultural spheres. The ideology of the Abdulhamit regime went against the interests of all sections and layers of the Ottoman bourgeoisie, which needed to rule the capitalist state

115 “Ermeni Komitelerinin Emelleri ve İhtilal Hareketleri”. Editor: Mehmet Kaynar. Der Yayınevi. İstanbul. 2001. p. 57

116 [http://www.izmirizmir.net/bilesenler/koseyazilari/yazdir.php?yazi\\_no=1097](http://www.izmirizmir.net/bilesenler/koseyazilari/yazdir.php?yazi_no=1097)

117 “Ermeni Komitelerinin Emelleri ve İhtilal Hareketleri”. Editor: Mehmet Kaynar. Der Yayınevi. İstanbul. 2001. p. 57

118 [http://www.izmirizmir.net/bilesenler/koseyazilari/yazdir.php?yazi\\_no=1097](http://www.izmirizmir.net/bilesenler/koseyazilari/yazdir.php?yazi_no=1097)

from head to toe, in order to impose a new ideology on the 'sick man of Europe'. Far from realizing aims mentioned by Trotsky such as "economic independence, the unity of nation and state, and political freedoms", the 1908 mutiny was followed not by a leap forward for Ottoman capitalism but by a period of oppression, crisis, war, genocide and the dissolution of the Empire; as for the tradition which came to power, it resulted in a militarist and statist regime similar to the ones created by decadent capitalism in the West.

How then are we to answer Rakovsky's question? Was this a mere coup d'état, or was it something more, even a revolution?

Perhaps it would make most sense to call it a freak of history. On the one hand, the 1908 movement resembled a putsch: 1908 didn't change the mode of production of the Ottoman Empire, it didn't transform an archaic society into a capitalist one.

On the other hand, the attempt to create a constitutional monarchy at the head of what the Young Turks intended should be a modern European state clearly represented an attempt to overthrow the outdated Ottoman imperial regime and replace it with a regime in accord with the political interests of a rising industrial bourgeoisie, and in this sense it could be seen as a truly revolutionary movement where a rising, progressive social class threw off the shackles of a political regime which defended the interests of a reactionary, outmoded social class. In short, the regime established in 1908 was riddled with contradictions

### After the 1908 mutiny: mass strikes and the socialist movement

The event that bears the closest similarities to the 1908 revolt, is the Russian Revolution of 1905. The most obvious similarity is the fact that in both cases, faced with massive opposition, absolutist monarchies granted constitutional regimes and parliaments. The difference was that the Ottoman Meclis-i Mebusan was considerably stronger than the Russian Duma, and the Ottoman bourgeoisie was determined not to hand power back to the monarchy. One of the main differences was that the 1905 revolution began directly with workers' strikes, whereas the 1908 mutiny began in the army under the leadership of the officers. That said, however, just like in Russia there was a strike wave in the Ottoman Empire in 1908 which deserves to be described as a mass strike, and while the Russian mass strike was longer lasting and the percentage of the participating population higher, these differences are surprisingly less than what may be expected.<sup>119</sup> As the first mass strike in the history of the Ottoman working class, and one of the first mass strikes of the

world working class, the mass strike of 1908 has as much importance as the overthrow of the Abdulhamit regime itself.

At their August 1908 Congress, the Narrow Socialists stated clearly that they saw the proletarian revolution as a realistic possibility in the Ottoman Empire and that socialism was the only way to truly emancipate the Ottoman working class. A strike wave far greater than their wildest dreams was to demonstrate the undeniable correctness of this analysis in a matter of weeks. In fact, the strikes began on July 30th among the tobacco and ferry workers in Constantinople. Between July 30th and December 20th 1908 there were at least 119 strikes in cities including Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Smyrna, Beirut, Mytilene, Varna, Samsun, Skopje, Bitola, Alexandroupoli, Aydin, Afyon, Gevgelija, Kavala, Drama, Eskisehir, Ankara, Konya, Eregli, Zonguldak, Manise, Adrianople, Svilengrad, Mitrovica, Zbekche, Damascus, Riyaq, Aleppo, Balikesir, Diyarbakir, Hareke, Xanthi, Adana and Jerusalem. Workers from nearly all sectors of the Ottoman proletariat took part, including ferry sailors, tobacco workers, dockers, printers, tram workers, carpet factory workers, box factory workers, porters, carpenters, fiber and paint workers, water company workers, cement factory workers, bakery workers, ice factory workers, janitors, soap factory workers, ship building workers, postmen, busboys, railroad workers, telegraph workers, workers in small stores, butchers' shops, barbers' shops and tailors, waiters and waitresses, miners, gas workers, sugar workers, leather workers, fez factory workers, municipality workers, olive oil factory workers, department store workers, sewing machine factory workers, warehousemen, cotton workers and weavers.

The total numbers participating is unknown. We know only the numbers for 31 of the 119 recorded strikes: 42,752.<sup>120</sup> However these include some of the strongest and most massive of the entire strike wave. While the total number taking part remains unknown, research about twenty years ago estimated that in August and September it reached more than 100,000.<sup>121</sup> Subsequent studies discovered many previously unknown strikes. Avram Benaroya, an active participant in the workers' movement at the time, recorded that membership of the trade unions, which barely existed before 1908, had risen by 1910 to between 125,000 and 150,000;<sup>122</sup> and this was a year when the workers' movement was suffering repression. We know also that massive strikes took place in cities where trade unions did not later appear, so we can safely conclude that the number participating in the strike wave was more than 100,000.

<sup>119</sup> Based on data for populations and the number of strikes, we see that in the 1905 mass strike in Russia 1,5% of the population participated, compared to 0,75% of the population in the 1908 Ottoman strikes..

<sup>120</sup> Kırpık, Cevdet. "Osmanlı Devleti'nde İşçiler ve İşçi Hareketleri (1876–1914)". Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü. 2004. Isparta. p. 256–263

<sup>121</sup> "Meşrutiyet, Emperyalizm ve İşçi Hareketi". Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988. p. 1836

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 1840

Unfortunately it is not possible to make a more detailed study of this movement here, or to draw all the lessons of this very important experience for the working class. We will limit ourselves to a brief account of the high points with some examples to illustrate its character.

In general the 1908 mass strike was a product of the spontaneous struggles of the working class; all the strikes were around demands for higher wages and better living and working conditions. There were also demands for the recognition of strike committees and spontaneous workers' organizations as well as the newly formed trade unions, along with demands opposing separate negotiations in different workplaces. Slogans of solidarity against the repressive measures taken against the strikes were also raised. While workers harboured certain illusions in promises made by the Society of Union and Progress during the July revolt, in many cases they did not back down when confronted with obstruction by state forces. At the center of the mass strike wave were the struggles of the railroad, dock and tobacco workers. All three sectors were significant and employed considerable numbers of workers across the Empire: tobacco was the biggest industry and export earner. The railroads employed workers of many different trades in separate workplaces ranging from rail repairmen to locomotive factory workers, train drivers and conductors to workers in the stations. Strikes by dock workers spread rapidly to factories using the docks and triggered many other strikes. Both the railroads and docks had immense power not only to stop imports and exports but also transport between cities, and this in turn encouraged other sectors of the working class to join the struggle.<sup>123</sup>

From the beginning of August the strikes began to spread, from tobacco and ferry workers in Constantinople to dock workers in the same city as well as Smyrna and Thessaloniki, and in the following weeks to tram workers, the printing, tobacco and weaving industries and other factories in these cities as well as the docks in Beirut, Varna and Bitola. Tobacco workers in Samsun went on a strike too, not only preventing scabs from going to work but also fighting the armed forces sent to suppress them. From August 23rd workers started to join the movement en masse, with strikes on the Thessaloniki-Zbekche railroad of the Eastern Railroad Company and simultaneously in the Constantinople Sirkeci locomotive factory. On August 30th, police raided the train stations in order to prevent a planned strike on the Constantinople-Thessaloniki railroad but this backfired and a protest strike started in Skopje and spread to many other railroads. At the same time a strike was planned on the Anatolian railroads. On August 26th, the day it was supposed to start, the Haydarpasha station in Asian

Constantinople was besieged by the police but, anticipating the attack, the railroad workers had decided to hold a meeting in the Moda district to discuss how to struggle. By the time the Anatolian railroads were on a country-wide strike, a strike committee had been formed to represent all workers in the company. On August 30th railroad workers in the Smyrna area also joined the strikes, but harsh repressive measures and arrests caused its temporary suspension after only a few days.<sup>124</sup>

Despite the repression, in September the movement grew. On the 13th, 12,000 tobacco workers in Kavala came out. They did not stand alone; thanks to the dockers' support they brought the whole city out in a general strike. Not even small shops opened, and there were mass demonstrations in the squares. The next day the Anatolian railroad strike started, well organized and with maximum participation. Striking workers defied all government warnings, and organized highly disciplined and coordinated demonstrations in several cities that enjoyed wide support from the local populations. On September 16th the government decided it had to act and cracked down on the strikes while accepting some of their demands. But as soon as the railroad strike in Anatolia was suppressed, the entire workforce of the Eastern Railroads of European Turkey came out. This strike too was quickly suppressed. But as this strike ended more strikes broke out on the railroads in Hejaz Smyrna. In Beirut railroad and dock workers completely unified their strikes, resisting repression and only ending their struggle when they were given a 50% pay rise. The Smyrna strike beginning on September 26th in many ways turned out to be the most violent. Using a fight between strikers and scabs as an excuse, on September 30th state forces intervened and arrested some of the workers. This led to massive clashes the next day between the armed forces and workers who gathered to rescue their arrested friends. One worker was killed in the clashes and many were injured. This only made the workers angrier: they cut the telegraph lines, locked scabs in the factories and started to burn down the bosses' warehouses. Union and Progress politicians trying to act as mediators between the bosses and workers were coldly rebuffed. Military forces in Smyrna were unable to control or suppress the striking workers and only after the army sent from Constantinople had literally occupied the city on October 7th did order reign in Smyrna once again. In the mean time there were armed clashes between the authorities and tobacco workers in Samsun. The day after the Smyrna strike was suppressed a Temporary Strike Law was hurriedly passed, banning the strikes. This did not prevent now illegal class struggles – but it was clear the balance of forces had shifted. The fire was damped down.<sup>125</sup>

123 Dinçer, Sinan. "The Revolution of 1908 and the Working class in Turkey". Boğaziçi University. Political Sciences and International Relations. 2006. Istanbul p. 28

124 Ibid, pp. 29-30, 33, 42-43

125 Dinçer, Sinan. "The Revolution of 1908 and the Working class in Turkey". Boğaziçi University. Political Sciences and

If the railroad, dock and tobacco industries were the industrial heart of the strike movement, Thessaloniki and Constantinople were its geographical centers; half of the strikes in 1908 took place in these two cities. The workers of Constantinople had started the strikes in the first place and showed themselves to be one of the most determined sections of the working class, especially with the strikes of the waiters and waitresses in October in defiance of the new strike ban. As for Thessaloniki, especially in September there was not a single workplace which did not participate in the movement. Every aspect of life was affected by the strikes there; the waiters' and waitresses' strike in September was so massive and solid that when representatives of the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian states were invited to the city by the Society of Union and Progress, there was no one in the entire city to serve them, and embarrassed Union and Progress members ended up putting on waiters' uniforms and serving them themselves.<sup>126</sup> The strike movement united workers of many different ethnic roots in common struggle, and also gained considerable sympathy among low ranking soldiers. During a beer factory strike, again in Thessaloniki, soldiers sent in to protect the scabs and management were greeted by striking workers chanting "Long live the soldiers!" and responded by shouting "Long live freedom!", embracing the workers and leaving afterwards thinking they had done what they were supposed to do, which did not mean protecting the scabs or the management.<sup>127</sup>

The Young Turks were not sure of their own strength and, faced with the Ottoman proletarian masses spontaneously rising up in unprecedented numbers with support among the soldiers, were uneasy at first about openly confronting the strike movement, instead trying to play the role of mediators. Only by making hundreds of cunning and well planned maneuvers were they eventually able to get in a position where they could openly ban strikes. For an important part of the Ottoman working class this was their first experience of the class struggle. And those sections of the class who did have experience of struggle may have been strong enough to rally workers behind them in Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Smyrna, Kavala, but not to lead the movement throughout the country. The movement was also isolated internationally; a significant section of the international workers' movement did not even think such a strike wave was possible in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman proletariat engaged in many more important struggles before 1914 but none was as huge as the strike wave of

1908. This had been defeated, but it constituted a link in that chain of historic defeats which is the pride and strength of international socialism. For what had taken place was none other than the mass strike described by Rosa Luxemburg just two years before:

*"The mass strike (...) is such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects all the phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution. Its adaptability, its efficiency, the factors of its origin are constantly changing. It suddenly opens new and wide perspectives of the revolution when it appears to have already arrived in a narrow pass and where it is impossible for anyone to reckon upon it with any degree of certainty. It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another – it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena."*<sup>128</sup>

The 1905 events in Russia that Luxemburg describes here differed from the 1908 movement in two important, related, respects. Firstly, by 1905 the Russian proletariat had already been through a whole series of major strike movements and gained a whole organizational and political experience that the young Ottoman proletariat did not yet possess. Secondly, and partly as a consequence, Russian workers also possessed a battle-hardened Social-Democratic organization which was able in some cases (Trotsky's election to lead the Petrograd soviet is the most striking example) to have a decisive influence on events. This was not the case for Ottoman socialism, which before 1908 was a debating, hard-working, determined, active yet marginal movement.

The 1908 mass strike was to be a turning point for the Ottoman socialist movement, transforming it into a widespread, powerful and effective mass movement. The mass strike had fed Ottoman socialism like the first rain of spring pouring onto the earth after a black winter, and very soon it would flower. Both left and right wing socialist organizations would begin to grow and strengthen with hitherto unseen speed. The most powerful bastions of Ottoman socialism would be the two cities where the heart of the mass strike had beaten strongest: Thessaloniki and Constantinople.

International Relations. 2006. Istanbul p. 31, 36-37, 40-41, 43-45

126 Adanır, Fikret. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ulusal Sorun ve Sosyalizmin Oluşması ve Gelişmesi: Makedonya Örneği". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. Istanbul. p. 66-67

127 Ibid, p. 68

128 Luxemburg, Rosa. "The Mass Strike". Part 4. 1906. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>





*Avram Benaroya*

The most active tendency to intervene in the mass strike were from the outset the Narrow Socialists, who played an important role in the struggles in most cities in Ottoman Europe. Militants such as Nikola Rusev, Emerich Fiala, Dimitar Tokhev, Ivan Pockov and Nikola Kasabov founded the first union organization in Thessaloniki, one of the first in the country, which immediately launched an ambitious campaign of open conferences.<sup>129</sup> Shortly after, Bulgarian militants of the anarcho-liberal tendency and their Jewish supporters led by Avram Benaroya founded their own separate organization. Soon, these new socialist unions united as the Workers' Association under Nikola Rusev's leadership.<sup>130</sup> This especially attracted Jewish workers in Thessaloniki and Benaroya soon became a rapidly rising leader. On May Day and in June of 1909 the Workers' Association organized demonstrations of thousands of workers. In August, it changed its name to the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki and was joined by the left wing of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, now organized as a legal party. The most notable new IMRO member was Dimitar Vlahov, a deputy in the Ottoman parliament. A small Muslim workers' group led by a teacher called Rasim Hasmet and a Greek group also joined. The Federation launched into ambitious publications work, producing four papers in four languages: *Jornal do Laborador* in Ladino, *Efimeris tu Ergatu* in Greek, *Rabotnicheski Vestnik* in Bulgarian and *Amele Gazetesi* in Turkish - all meaning 'Workers' Paper'.<sup>131</sup>

129 Dumont, Paul. "Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. Istanbul. p. 89

130 Ibid, p. 90

131 Ibid, p. 91-93

The Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki became a serious force, however the co-existence of Narrow Socialist militants and opportunists in the same group proved problematic from the start and destabilized the new organization. While the Narrows in Thessaloniki participated, they retained membership of the Social Democratic Workers' Organization of Macedonia and Adrianople, which itself launched a new publication at the beginning of 1909 called *Rabotnicheski Iskra* (Workers Spark). The Narrows did not like the fact that the Federation was working with Vlahov, elected to parliament from the Union and Progress list and the left wing of IMRO. The Narrows argued that Benaroya's adoption of the federative model of Austrian socialism was keeping alive nationalist prejudices among the workers. A split was inevitable. Only two months after its foundation, after some of its leaders marched together with representatives of the bourgeoisie and Freemasons in a protest against the murder of the Spanish Anarchist Francisco Ferrer, the Narrows left, taking with them a large majority of the Bulgarian members to form the Social Democratic Workers' Organization of Thessaloniki. The Federation soon ceased publication of its Turkish and Bulgarian papers, however, it was still much stronger than the Narrows' rival organization, and within its Jewish section a left wing led by the tailor Abraham Haason emerged, which opposed both working with Freemasons and representatives of the bourgeoisie as well Benaroya's federative principle in general.<sup>132</sup> The Federation's practical roots in the Bulgarian anarcho-liberal and broad socialist traditions, and the theoretical influence of Austrian socialism on its leaders, placed the Federation firmly on the right wing of international socialism and it was strongly rejected by the left wing of Ottoman socialism. Nevertheless, developments in the coming period were to push the organization towards the center rather than the right both internationally and at home..

The Narrow Socialists may have found themselves in a minority in the Thessaloniki workers' movement but this was far from the case. In many other cities of the Empire where they led the socialist and workers' movement. In cities like Bitola and Xanthi the Narrow Socialists had founded workers' organizations themselves and continued to dominate by them; in Bitola the local leader was none other than Vasil Glavinov, leader of the Social Democratic Workers' Organization of Macedonia and Adrianople. But Constantinople was the Narrows' strongest bastion. The first socialist organization there was founded by the Bulgarian printer Teodor Sivachev, a Narrow Socialist militant, at the beginning of 1909, as was the first union organization which organized the May Day demonstrations in the city the same year.<sup>133</sup> The

132 Benaroya, Abraham. "A Note on the 'Socialist Federation of Saloniki'". *Jewish Social Studies* XI. 1949. p. 70

133 Ginzberg, Roland. "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı A".

Socialist Center of Constantinople was an organic part of the Narrow Socialist organization in the Ottoman Empire and followed its political line. Aside from Teodor Sivachev its founders included Greek Narrow Socialist militants such as Zaharias Vezestenis and Stefanos Papadopoulos, as well as some Armenian workers led by the Armenian militant Karekin Kozikian, also known as Yessalem, who had arrived in Constantinople in 1908.<sup>134</sup>

The Socialist Centre of Constantinople produced several important publications, the first, owned and edited by Sirvanizade Mahmud Tahir, being the Turkish language İşçiler Gazetesi ('Workers' Paper'<sup>135</sup>), Tahir, who worked with a Greek militant on the publication,<sup>136</sup> was without doubt influenced by the mass strike and was close to the organization, later forming relations with the Ottoman Socialist Party created in 1910 - according to some sources he was among the Party's founders.<sup>137</sup> İşçiler Gazetesi followed the Socialist Centre line and acted as a publication of this organization. Its plain language and interest in matters concerning the lives of workers made it a more successful and widespread publication than the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki's Turkish publication, Amele Gazetesi.<sup>138</sup> İşçiler Gazetesi was clearly a proletarian internationalist publication:

*"Aiming for the development of relations based on mutual solidarity, the workers of the Ottoman lands who have not so far managed to create a unity with their brothers and sisters in foreign countries, declare that they are always together with their friends in Europe with all their hearts. Soon the workers of the Ottoman lands will be among the vanguard both of Europe and the army of labor".<sup>139</sup>*

Soon after İşçiler Gazetesi began to appear in mid-

"Beynelmîlel İşçiler İttihadı (Mütareke İstanbulu'nda Rum Ağırlıklı Bir İşçi Örgütü ve TKP ile İlişkileri)". Editor: Erden Akbulut and Mete Tunçay. Sosyal Tarih Yayınları. 2009. İstanbul. p. 44

134 Harris, George. "The Origins of Communism in Turkey". Hoover Institute Publications. Stanford University Press. Stanford. 1967 p. 21

135 A more modern term than the previous Amele Gazetesi, which could more properly be translated as 'The Toilers' Paper'

136 Gazel, Ahmet Ali and Şaban Ortak. "İkinci Meşrutiyet'ten 1927 Yılına Kadar Yayın İmtiyazı Alan Gazete ve Mecmualar (1908-1927)". <http://e-dergi.atauni.edu.tr/index.php/SBED/article/viewFile/318/313> p. 243

137 Topçuoğlu, Hayriye. "Bektaş Ahmet Rıfkı: Hayatı ve Eserleri". [http://www.hbektasveli.gazi.edu.tr/dergi\\_dosyalar/19-87-142.pdf](http://www.hbektasveli.gazi.edu.tr/dergi_dosyalar/19-87-142.pdf) p. 7

138 Harris, George. "The Origins of Communism in Turkey". Hoover Institute Publications. Stanford University Press. Stanford. 1967 p. 20-21

139 Ökçün, Gündüz. "Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu, 1909: Belgeler – Yorumlar." Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları No 503. Ankara. 1982 p. 38

February 1909, a new weekly socialist publication called Nor Hossank ('New Current') was founded by Karekin Kozikian together with revolutionaries such as the great Armenian poet Ruben Sevak, a solid defender of the workers' cause, and the Hunchak founder Gevorg Gharadjian, also known as Arkomedes, who was in Constantinople at the time.<sup>140</sup> Kozikian who, as we have seen was a founding member of the Socialist Center of Constantinople, had also joined the Hunchak Social Democrat Party.<sup>141</sup> At first he tried to work with Tigran Zaven, with whom he had collaborated on the paper Yerikri Tzayn,<sup>142</sup> But the 1908 revolt and the declaration of the constitutional regime had seriously softened Zaven's irreconcilable internationalist attitude towards the Young Turks, and after forming close relations with the likes of the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki parliamentary deputy, Dimitar Vlahov, Zaven more or less started to defend a similar line; Kozikian, who maintained his unwavering internationalism and belief in the class struggle, had to part company. By defending the Socialist Center's views in the Hunchak Party, Kozikian sowed the seeds for a left wing faction of this party, but more importantly, with Kozikian's group being one of the Socialist Center's founders, for the first time the eastern and the western traditions of Ottoman socialism and their left wings were united. In the first issue of Nor Hossank, Kozikian called for uncompromising class struggle in the Ottoman Empire:

*"Despite the fact that in Turkey economical development is very slow and mechanized industry is quite new (...) Turkey is already on the road to becoming a capitalist country. Class struggle has already begun (...) Ten thousands of workers are working in the factories, workshops and the railroads of the country and without a doubt they are being exploited more than ever before. Are they supposed to remain silent and unmoving while they wait for Turkey to reach the level of Europe?"<sup>143</sup>*

Shortly after, the Jewish members of the Socialist Center started a weekly publication called El Laborador ('The worker') and in the same period Greek members began publishing Ergatis (Worker).<sup>144</sup> Like

140 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 233-234

141 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "Le mouvement révolutionnaire arménien, 1890-1903" Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique. Vol. 14 N°4. pp. 596

142 Papazyan, Vahan. "Anılarım". Vol II. Section 15.

143 Ter-Minasian, Anahide. "1876-1923 Döneminde Osmanlı Toplumunda Sosyalist Hareketin Doğuşunda ve Gelişmesinde Ermeni Topluluğun Rolü". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 235

144 Ginzberg, Roland. "Beynelmîlel İşçiler İttihadı A". "Beynelmîlel İşçiler İttihadı (Mütareke İstanbulu'nda Rum Ağırlıklı Bir İşçi Örgütü ve TKP ile İlişkileri)". Editor:

İşçiler Gazetesi and Nor Hossank these publications very clearly defended internationalism:

*"This paper is being published to bring together the socialists in the Ottoman Empire and to form an international socialist party here – 'an international party' because any other sort of socialism in the Ottoman Empire is impossible – to become its voice. Thus we will leave no Turk, Greek or Bulgarian who wants to join us out, given they are socialists".*<sup>145</sup>

So by 1909 the newly unified left wing of Ottoman socialism was publishing in the five main languages spoken in the Empire: Greek (Ergatis), Armenian (Nor Hossank), Bulgarian (Rabotnicheski Iskra), Turkish (İşçiler Gazetesi) and Ladino (El Laborador). Unlike the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki, the organizations of the left wing did not have thousands of members: these were narrow organizations of cadres with strict criteria for membership. But to conclude from this that the left was ineffective and insignificant would be a serious mistake; alongside political organizations of cadres, it had formed class unions. The Constantinople Association of Unions,<sup>146</sup> which consisted of eight unions organizing Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Jewish and Bulgarian workers and describing themselves as revolutionary internationalist class unions together had a numerical strength more or less equal to that of the Socialist Workers' Federation, with similar organizations around it in several other cities as well. Nor was the influence of the left current among the masses negligible. This was the only current in the whole Empire irreconcilably to oppose the Union and Progress. Dashnaksutyun, if it could be counted as part of Ottoman socialism, clearly constituted its right wing and was closely allied with Union and Progress, while the defenders of Bulgarian Broad Socialism were busy cheering for the Young Turks. Those organizations belonging to the center rather than the right, like the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki and the Hunchak Social Democrat Party, although distancing themselves from the new regime, all gave it more or less conditional support; when supporters of Abdulhamid tried to stage a coup d'état they had joined the 'Action Army' organized by Union and Progress against it. At the end of 1909, however, feeling stronger against the now fully defeated Abdulhamid, Union and Progress began to crack down on the socialists, and despite their support for the government both the Federation and the Hunchak Party were targeted. Slowly yet surely the question of socialist unity was brought back onto the agenda.

Erden Akbulut and Mete Tunçay. Sosyal Tarih Yayınları. 2009. İstanbul. p. 45

145 Kechriotis, Vangelis. "Greek-Orthodox, Ottoman Greeks or Just Greeks? Theories of Coexistence in the Aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution". <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/hist/tgallant/documents/kechriotisottomangreekidentity.pdf> p. 69

146 Sendikal Birlik

In February 1910 a new paper joined the existing socialist publications in the Ottoman Empire called İstirak ('Commune'; after being closed down it was to continue under names such as 'Humanity', 'Civilization', 'Socialist'). In September the circle around this paper formed the Osmanlı Sosyalist Firkasior (Ottoman Socialist Party), which was significant as the first socialist organization mostly formed and composed of people from the Muslim community. The leader of the Ottoman Socialist Party was an adventurer called Huseyin Hilmi who had adopted socialism after seeing socialist demonstrations during a trip to Romania. Hilmi's understanding of socialism was a reformist and opportunist one close to the opinions of Jaurès on the right wing of the international socialist movement. The Paris section of the Party was formed by Refik Nevzat, who declared himself to be as much a nationalist as he was a socialist. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Socialist Party conducted a brave and uncompromising opposition to Union and Progress,<sup>147</sup> and some of its more left wing militants defended internationalist and revolutionary positions. But despite its claims to be a centralized party, the organization remained a circle with no common views among its members, so it is not possible to claim that there was an organised left wing or opposition within it. The most powerful representative of the left tendency in the OSP was Baha Tevfik, an influential thinker, materialist and internationalist who had contributed to Huseyin Hilmi's adoption of socialism in the first place. In an article in the third issue of İstirak, Tevfik clearly demonstrated his revolutionary and anti-reformist views:

*"Socialists are for revolution, they are revolutionaries. This is because they have understood that they can't impose their goals in a peaceful way; because they have understood that their goals, whose grand and sacred nature they do not doubt, cannot be realized peacefully (...) They are not those who make a revolution but those who form its body with their interventions. Socialists are for revolution. This is because they see the revolution as just and helpful".*<sup>148</sup>

He also defended an anarchist vision:

*"Anarchism means there being no other law over the individual than the laws of nature, making the wonderful law of the struggle for life come out in all its nakedness. In this new age I see anarchism. In my opinion humanity which has passed from slavery into wage-slavery and which will go from wage-slavery into socialism will reach anarchism in the end and realize all the independence and all*

147 "Meşrutiyet, Emperyalizm ve İşçi Hareketi". Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi, Vol 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1988 p. 1841

148 Tunçay, Mete. "Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar I (1908-1925)". Bilgi Yayınevi. İstanbul. 1978 p. 43



*the wonders of individuality*".<sup>149</sup>

Another OSP member to defend internationalist opinions was a young man called Rusen Zeki who wrote in the second issue of *Iştirak*:

*"The bond called nationality is a catastrophe for humanity. For it will make humanity crawl in the same life for centuries."*<sup>150</sup>

During 1910 the Union and Progress government became increasingly repressive and stepped up its attacks against socialists. While the Dashnaks continued loyally to support the Young Turks, others such as the Socialist Workers' Federation and the Hunchaks began to distance themselves, which led to a renewed perspective for joint work and even organizational unity with the left. At the end of January 1911 the '1st. Conference of Ottoman Socialist Organizations' was held with delegates from many local organizations of the left and the center. The outcome of the conference more or less reflected a victory for the line put forward by the left. Even the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki moved closer to the left now. The conference strongly condemned the nationalist and militaristic policies of the Union and Progress government and emphasized the need for a Balkan federation to be formed as a result of the struggles of the Ottoman proletariat for its own interests. While an immediate merger was ruled out, the conference expressed its desire for the Ottoman Empire to be represented in the Second International<sup>151</sup> by a single party uniting all the socialist organizations in the country.<sup>152</sup> The Socialist Center of Constantinople also decided to cease its own publication in *Ladino*, *El Laborador*, in order to strengthen distribution of the new Socialist Workers' Federation *Ladino* publication, *Solidaridad Obradera* ('Workers' Solidarity').<sup>153</sup> The first fruit of these good

relations was the May Day demonstration by 20,000 workers in Thessaloniki, a city of 150,000 inhabitants.<sup>154</sup> But such joint work proved short lived and by the end of 1911 relations deteriorated. Faced with increasing repression prior to forthcoming elections, the centrist Hunchak Party, Socialist Workers' Federation and Huseyin Hilmi's Ottoman Socialist Party decided to support and work with the Freedom and Alliance Party. This had been formed by dissident Young Turks opposed to the Society of Union and Progress, and had become a powerful center of bourgeois opposition, but on the same class basis as Union and Progress. For the left wing the cooperation of the centrists with bourgeois forces was just a repeat of the same song from a few years before.

## War and genocide:

### Ottoman socialism's trial by fire

The Italo-Turkish war broke out on 29th September 1911, with the invasion of the Ottoman Empire's Libyan territory; it was to last until October 1912. Italy, which had been preparing for war since the summer, was a latecomer in the race to divide up the planet, and with the number of places not already occupied by the other great powers running out, the Italian bourgeoisie's initial military hesitations soon melted away. Despite its initial hesitations due to its weaker position the Ottoman state, led now by a militarist Union and Progress government, also managed to mobilize for war. Known today in Turkey as the Tripolitan war, this conflict like others at the time was a 'practice run' for World War I. In Italy there was great conflict within the Socialist Party, with the right wing declaring their open support for the government and the intransigent left wing waging a bitter struggle against it.<sup>155</sup> As for Ottoman socialism, the lines weren't so clear. The revolutionary socialists unsurprisingly opposed the war while the right wing elements cooperating with Union and Progress unsurprisingly supported the government, but the Italo-Turkish war was to be of immense significance for the evolution of those elements in the middle. The Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki condemned the war but did not condemn Union and Progress as strongly as the Italian government, putting the main blame on the Italians. However, the war made the Federation question its line and eventually the split in Italian Socialist Party led the group, perhaps the most active Ottoman organization in the Second International, to side with the left wing of the international socialist movement. In the Social Democrat Hunchak Party the position of its Students' Union, while similar to that of the Socialist Workers' Federation in not holding Union and Progress responsible, went a step further in

149 [http://hasat.org/forum/Baha\\_Tevfik-k11110s1.html](http://hasat.org/forum/Baha_Tevfik-k11110s1.html)

150 Zeki, Ruşen. "Sosyalizmin Terakkiyatı ve İstikbali", *İştirak*, No: 2, 21 June 1928

151 Every single socialist organization in the Ottoman Empire had relations with the Second International and with the exception of the Ottoman Socialist Party which had ties with Jaures, they were all represented in some way as members. However there was never an Ottoman section of the Second International. The Social Democrat Hunchak Party had been a member since 1903-1904 and as a Caucasian party it was represented by Plekhanov. Ottoman Narrow Socialists and the left wing were members as part of the (Narrow) BSDWP and were represented by the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists. The Dashnaks became members as the sub-section of Ottoman Armenia in 1907 and the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessaloniki joined as the Thessaloniki sub-section in 1909.

152 Haupt, George and Paul Dumont. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalist Hareketler". *Gözlem Yayınları*. İstanbul. 1977 p. 225-227

153 Ginzberg, Roland. "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı A". "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı (Mütareke İstanbulu'nda Rum Ağırlıklı Bir İşçi Örgütü ve TKP ile İlişkileri)". Editor: Erden Akbulut and Mete Tunçay. *Sosyal Tarih Yayınları*. 2009. İstanbul. p. 45

154 Dumont, Paul. "Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. *İletişim*. 2004. İstanbul. p. 102

155 International Communist Current. "The Italian Communist Left". 1992. p. 15



describing the war more generally as a product of the capitalist order, though they still placed the main blame on Italian capital:

*"The Italian-Turkish war is still going on. Its sole cause is Italian capitalism's policy of aggression (...) We the socialist students have the belief that this war which is incredibly harmful for the development and progress of humanity is a result of the capitalist system of the current society and that it will not go away unless this system is abolished and socialism is realized (...) We intend to express our deep anger against the war and the Italian attack and shout all together: Down with war! Down with Italy's capitalist attack! Long live socialism!"*<sup>156</sup>

The elections to the Meclis-i Mebusan in February 1912 give an opportunity to draw many conclusions about the substance of parliamentarianism on the eve of capitalism's decadence. This is known in Ottoman history as the "election by truncheon"<sup>157</sup> (ie the truncheons used to beat up members of the opposition): the party of the state, won the elections run by the state by using the state's tools of repression. The result, not surprisingly, was the victory of the state... The "election by truncheon" was a perfect model for elections to come, of parliamentarianism, democracies and parliaments. The Society of Union and Progress' "truncheon elections" offered a caricature of bourgeois democracies in the 20th and 21st centuries and their open or covert practices. But while certain Ottoman socialist candidates like Dimitar Vlahov humbly accepted defeat, the bourgeois opponents of Union and Progress in the Freedom and Alliance Party had no intention of surrendering. In May 1912, Freedom and Alliance supporters in the Ottoman Army organized themselves as the 'Liberator Officers' and rebelled, retreating into the Macedonian mountains, in an action similar to the July 1908 mutiny. The government fell and the Freedom and Alliance Party came to power. Just as it had in July 1908, the centrist tendency of Ottoman socialism saw this as a moment of triumph. Once it had consolidated its position the Freedom and Alliance government did indeed briefly relax the repression against socialist organizations. But after only a short time the left wing was once again proven correct; as far as the workers were concerned the new boss was the same as the old one. Socialists, strikes and workers' struggles were soon suppressed again; Freedom and Alliance just like Union and Progress before it had no intention of letting the socialists do as they please.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Haupt, George and Paul Dumont. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalist Hareketler". Gözlem Yayınları. İstanbul. 1977 p. 142

<sup>157</sup> Sopalı Seçim

<sup>158</sup> Dumont, Paul. "Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu". "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik" Editor: Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İletişim. 2004. İstanbul. p. 106-107

In October 1912, even before the Italo-Turkish war was over, the war in the Balkans began. Known in history as the First Balkan War, it opposed the Ottoman Empire to the Balkan League of Greece, Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria. Even more than the Italo-Turkish war, this conflict was a rehearsal for World War I. A total of 340,000 Ottoman soldiers were either killed in battle, wounded, captured or died from disease, Balkan League losses numbered 145,000. The war ended in an Ottoman defeat, which doomed the new Freedom and Alliance government and led to a coup d'état when on January 23rd 1913 a prominent group of Union and Progress members raided Bab Ali, the center of government. With this began the reign of the three pashas, whose names and cruelty are still remembered today: Ismail Enver, Mehmet Talat and Ahmet Cemal. As a result of the Treaty of London that ended the First Balkan War the Ottoman Empire lost nearly all its territories in Europe, including Adrianople. Thessaloniki, was definitively lost to the Empire. Having come to power with ultra-nationalist slogans against the failure of Freedom and Alliance in the war, Union and Progress was itself incapable of improving the situation. A mere two weeks after the end of the First Balkan War in March 1913 the second began, this time among the Christian Balkan states with Bulgaria which had led the war effort in the first war now confronted by Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania. The Ottoman Empire entered the war against Bulgaria allied with the other states and in the end managed to retake Adrianople. The Second Balkan War was much shorter than the first, ending a few months later with the Treaty of Bucharest signed on 18th July 1913. Peace reigned in the Balkans - yet it was a peace pregnant with a greater war of unimaginable horror and destruction.

The Balkan wars changed the whole landscape of Ottoman socialism. The organization most affected was the Thessaloniki sub-section of the International, the Socialist Workers' Federation, had always seen itself as an Ottoman organization. After 1913 Thessaloniki was no longer an Ottoman city but a Greek one – and despite developing a position against the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Federation reluctantly became a part of the workers' movement and socialist movement of Greece. More than the Italo-Turkish war, the Balkan Wars had pushed the organization further to the left; it organized mass demonstrations against the war in Thessaloniki and openly condemned differences of religion and nationality.<sup>159</sup> All this experience contributed to the Federation taking an internationalist position in the coming World War I and later participating in the formation of communist organizations in Greece.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Haupt, George and Paul Dumont. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalist Hareketler". Gözlem Yayınları. İstanbul. 1977 p. 175

<sup>160</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist\\_Workers\\_%27\\_Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Workers_%27_Federation)

The effect of the Balkan Wars was not limited to the Thessalonian federation. The loss of Thessaloniki and the Thessalonian federation seriously affected organizations of the left wing in the Empire. Despite criticizing the Thessalonian federation's opportunism and its cooperation with bourgeois forces, the left had a history of relations with it, and unlike the Social Democrat Hunchak Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the Dashnaks) and the Ottoman Socialist Party, both the left and the Thessalonian federation were international organizations, organizations consisting of members of different nationalities. In this sense, with Thessaloniki now outside the Empire, the Ottoman revolutionary socialists stood alone. Led by the organization in Constantinople that had taken the name Türkiye Sosyalist Fırkası (Socialist Party of Turkey), the revolutionary socialists, together with the union organizations around them, had courageously protested against the Italo-Turkish war.<sup>161</sup> The Balkan wars also practically separated the Ottoman revolutionary socialists from the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists as well, and this was reflected politically in their positions on elections from 1912: unlike the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists who participated in the elections, the Ottoman revolutionary socialists took an anti-parliamentarian position against the compromising attitude of the socialists in the Meclis-i Mebusan.<sup>162</sup> The left wing of Ottoman socialism evolved into a separate tendency in the international socialist movement rather than being a mere reflection of another tendency. Its anti-war position in 1914 was also quite radical compared to other socialist organizations in the Empire. This was clearly demonstrated in a address to the international proletariat written a shortly before the start of World War I, by the Constantinople organization:

*"On this historical day when battle cries of protest from the exploited of the whole world are united once again, we too protest with you against capitalist society, the exploitation of labour, the oppression of the workers, this great social injustice.*

*Being aware of our class interests and duty, we fraternally declare once again our contribution and commitment to the great social revolution which is the only thing that can end the exploitation of human beings by other human beings and this system of misery. (...)*

*The war called the Balkan War which we unfortunately could not stop has produced results that will delay the new awakening of the population and the proletarians, the effects of which the*

161 Ginzberg, Roland. "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı A". "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı (Mütareke İstanbulu'nda Rum Ağırlıklı Bir İşçi Örgütü ve TKP ile İlişkileri)". Editor: Erden Akbulut and Mete Tunçay. Sosyal Tarih Yayınları. 2009. İstanbul. p. 46

162 Ibid.

*working class of the East will not shake off for a long time.*

*This war left thousands of urban and rural workers' families in poverty, their orphans left to the mercy of this vicious society.*

*This war destroyed cities and villages and brought with it misery and poverty making the whole population tremble.*

*This war incited the grudges and bigotry between the nations of the East and strengthened the nationalist mentality which is in the interests of the rulers and capitalists.*

*This war emptied the state treasury; and now they are making us, their slaves pay for that money.*

*This war brought a political oppression unseen before.*

*The streets of our cities are filled with homeless, hungry old men, women and children. The immigrants whose houses were pillaged during the invasion of Rumelia and who have nothing left now are taking refuge with us en masse, settling in Thrace and Anatolia. Now new events take place in Anatolia triggered by bigotry and sectarian grudges based on religious differences and now the local population ends up having to emigrate in the opposite direction.*

*The government has installed a disgusting rule of oppression on the back of the ruined population, always under the guise of being in line with the constitution: Martial law all the time, violent measures against organizations, meetings and the press...*

*We could not hold a demonstration on the May Day of 1914, we curse this arbitrary rule and together with you we shout once again: 'Down with the bourgeoisie! Long live freedom! Long live the social revolution!'"*<sup>163</sup>

Ottoman socialism and especially its revolutionary wing had openly condemned the Italo-Turkish war and the two Balkan wars and only remained in existence thanks to the support of the working class. Socialism, and especially its left wing, defended the most beautiful future possible, both for the Ottoman territories and the whole world. The internationalist organizations of Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian, Jewish, Turkish and other workers were convinced that the working class in the Ottoman territories, together with the workers of all countries, would make a social revolution in order to create a socialist world. Their conviction was as pure as the dreams of the future they hoped to see, and if they made mistakes during the course of their struggle, these were honourable

163 Haupt, George and Paul Dumont. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalist Hareketler". Gözlem Yayınları. İstanbul. 1977 p. 191-192

mistakes. Yet waiting at the door was a great catastrophe for international socialism and the world working class - and yet another great catastrophe for Ottoman socialism and the working class.

On June 28th 1914 Gavrilo Princip, a young Serbian nationalist from Bosnia, shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand, crown prince of Austria, and the world changed. Of course, the causes of World War I went far deeper than a Serbian student killing an archduke; the assassination merely provided a pretext. By the beginning of August, the four big nations of Europe - England, Germany, France and Russia - had entered the war. All the leading factions in the Ottoman Empire, under the de facto dictatorship of the Enver-Talat-Cemal troika (Ministers of War, Internal Affairs and the Navy respectively), were also more or less certain that the Empire would enter the war - the question of the day was, on which side? The faction led by Cemal tried to form an alliance with England and France, whereas Enver and Talat thought they must enter the war on Germany's side. Following the failure of Cemal and his friends to ally with England and France, Enver and Talat had it their way and on August 2nd a secret treaty was signed with Germany. On the 30th October, following several days of skirmishes in the Black Sea, the Ottoman Empire and Russia declared war on each other.

Yet the Magnanimous Ottoman State<sup>164</sup> was planning more for its population than just giving them guns and sending them to die or kill their class brothers. Albeit temporarily, the Ottoman state bourgeoisie had more or less solved its internal conflict; Union and Progress had won, Freedom and Alliance had lost. Indeed Union and Progress had won so overwhelmingly that Freedom and Alliance didn't even have the strength to go into opposition, as Union and Progress had done when it lost power. The state bourgeoisie had put its house in order. But the victory of Union and Progress was not absolute; it had not mastered the working class despite the latter's defeat - the class struggle was still alive, strikes still broke out, the memory of the 1908 strikes was still fresh, and a revolutionary internationalist left was still intact. For the bourgeoisie, the most advanced, most militant, most dangerous elements of the Ottoman working class had been among the non-Muslims. And there was another force that Union and Progress had not yet mastered: the non-Muslim bourgeoisie still dominated industrial, mercantile and commercial capital, and retained its position as an independent power. Although the most powerful political representatives of non-Muslim capital, the Dashnaks, had accepted Union and Progress' call to defend the motherland in the coming war, they had not accepted the demand for their organizations in Russia to act on behalf of the Ottomans against Russia.

his was a period in history when not just the balance of forces within the capitalist system were changing but

<sup>164</sup> This was an official title adopted by the Ottoman state.

the whole substance, form and functioning of the system itself. During the 19th century, the bourgeoisie had generally resolved problems arising from ethnic or religious differences without, shedding too much blood - at least by the 20th century standards.<sup>165</sup> But in the 19th century, no state bourgeoisie had become such a powerful and important actor within society. Expanding across the globe had made the capitalist mode of production a relatively healthy body in the 19th century. But on reaching the natural limits of its expansion, this healthy, upstanding youngster had turned into a sick old man, and the Ottoman Empire, the so-called 'sick man of Europe', reflected this transformation in the extreme. The dominant role played by the state bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state in the Ottoman Empire in these years was to become more or less the norm for most states in the new century. The Ottoman state bourgeoisie wanted to control everything, everyone. It could not feel comfortable and secure without doing so. And in order to do so, the state had sought a new ideology and found it in Turkish nationalism. If there was to be private capital outside the state, if there was to be an industrial, mercantile and commercial bourgeoisie, the Ottoman state would be unable to sleep soundly without knowing that this bourgeoisie was devoted and loyal in each and every way, on every possible issue, to the state. The solution could only be the 'Turkification' of capital, regardless of how much bloodshed or how many lives it cost.

The Magnanimous Ottoman State was terrified of the non-Muslims. It was terrified of the non-Muslim workers for they were leading the whole Ottoman working class, and it was terrified of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie for they were an independent force who controlled all the main arteries of the Ottoman economy. The state bourgeoisie felt inferior to the non-Muslim bourgeoisie. They felt inferior also because they were sitting at a table surrounded by greater and more powerful states; if there was a weak link among all the European states, it was the Ottoman Empire. Can a state go insane? Faced externally with the need to negotiate with forces every single one of whom could bring down the Empire, and internally with the need to co-exist with a force it was terrified to death of, the Ottoman state perhaps became the first state in history to go insane.

The fear of the working class felt by the Ottoman state was of course not at all unfounded and shared with all the states of the world. Just how well founded this fear was became clear in October 1917 with the victory of the proletarian revolutionary wave, which made the capitalist world tremble in the following years. The Ottoman state's fear of non-Muslims might seem irrational: the non-Muslim bourgeoisie faced the same

<sup>165</sup> This does not of course mean that capitalism was ever a 'peaceful' society, as is witnessed by colonial massacres of indigenous populations, or the pogroms against the Jews in Tsarist Russia, for example.

dangers as the Magnanimous Ottoman State, and had a trust in the Ottoman state as complete as it was unfounded. Until deportations began of prominent Armenian politicians in Constantinople in 1915, the largest Armenian party, the Dashnaks, had been enthusiastic and loyal supporters of the Ottoman state, which was planning the massacre of all Armenians. It is said that one of the leading Armenian deputies known for being close to the Dashnaks, Krikor Zohrab, on the day before his deportation to be murdered, was playing backgammon with Talat Pasha, one of the most prominent architects of the Armenian genocide, in the Union and Progress club in Pera, Constantinople. Whether this rumour is true or not, it illustrates the general political line of the Armenian politicians.

And yet, only a short while after the declaration of the constitutional regime, plotting had started against non-Muslims and specifically the Armenians. Although it was officially condemned as an act against the constitutional regime generally, many individual members of Union and Progress had declared their support for the Adana massacre directed against the Armenians in 1909, and some may have even participated personally. In 1914, Greeks began to be conscripted into Labour Battalions, where they were forced to work for eighteen hours a day. These were an early example of the forced labour camps set up by many states, especially in the first half of the 20th century. Their aim was the annihilation of the targeted ethnic population by working them to death. In February 1915 attacks against non-Muslims took a different turn when Armenians also began to be forcibly conscripted into the Labour Battalions. On April 20th 1915 there were clashes in the city of Van between Armenians and Ottoman armed forces., after the mostly Armenian population refused mayor Cevdet Bey's order to conscript 4,000 people in order to get rid of the male population. By the beginning of May, 55,000 Armenians had been massacred. On the night of April 24th, also known as the Bloody Sunday, deportations of Armenians in Constantinople began. Since May, the Armenian population had been subjected to forced emigrations, walks of death, massacres and concentration camps. Nor was it only Armenians: in November 1916, the Greeks of the Black Sea were targeted for similar attacks. All Greeks from Tirebolu to Samsun, men, women, children, young and old, were forced out of their homes, not allowed to take any of their belongings, and forced on a walk of death which cost the lives of 350,000. By the end of the war, the number of Armenians murdered was as high as 1,500,000. The 20th century was to be a century of genocides and the Ottoman state had the privilege of committing the first of the new century. The heir of the Ottoman state - the Republic of Turkey - and the heir of the Union and Progress tradition - the Kemalist movement - were to continue the same policies of genocide and ethnic cleansing, due to the same fears and pursuing the same purposes. But the

Turkish state bourgeoisie, however many rivers of blood it shed, however many deaths it visited on the homes of working class families, still longed for the safe and comfortable sleep that it was condemned never to enjoy.

Ottoman socialism, especially the revolutionary socialists, had managed to pass the trials of the Italo-Turkish and Balkan wars, though they had been badly weakened by them. The war that began in 1914 and the genocides that took place in the following years broke the back of Ottoman socialism. The workers' movement was strong enough to protect the socialist movement in the wars prior to 1914 but, just as the Ottoman state was the weakest link among the European states, the Ottoman working class was the youngest and most inexperienced in Europe, and Ottoman socialism was among the newest and most dispersed currents of international socialism. Moreover, the genocides had targeted non-Muslims who constituted the majority of socialist militants in the Empire. Although a tradition of solidarity with non-Muslim workers had begun to develop during the strikes, Muslim workers, were not sufficiently class conscious to show solidarity with the victims of such a large and organized practice of genocide in a way that could make a difference; in other words through mass actions. And non-Muslim workers lacked the influence to trigger such actions. Only a revolutionary minority of socialists had the will, clarity and determination to defend the principles of internationalism till the end no matter what - and it turned out that they lacked the strength even to protect the physical existence of their organization.

By 1914 there were only two organizations in the Ottoman Empire which could be considered truly socialist: the Social Democrat Hunchak Party and the revolutionary organization in Istanbul (the Turkish Socialist Party<sup>166</sup>) coming from the Narrow Socialist tradition. After years of cooperation with Union and Progress, the Dashnaks had nothing left to do with socialism and in fact the party had spent its final years in the Empire trying to gain democratic reforms in the Meclis-i Mebusan. Huseyin Hilmi's Ottoman Socialist Party had been easily suppressed with the exile of its leading members as soon as Union and Progress started to crack down on the opposition in 1913. A socialist tendency arising among the Muslim population, the circle led by Dr. Hasan Riza who had made contact with the Second International, did not even manage to form a party. The Armenians among the revolutionary socialists whose organization included militants of all ethnicities, were also active in the Hunchak Party. Both took a position against war. The Hunchak congresson July 24th 1914 came up with the following resolution:

*"We are going through a very important and*

166 Not to be confused with the Socialist Party of Turkey, which was the name taken by the Ottoman Socialist Party after World War I.

*serious period, unseen in the history of the world before. The entire human civilization has been foundering under the suffocating pressures of the war. The event of today is nothing but an awful and horrible strike of the malicious movements and thoughts of the past (...) Despite this pessimistic and inappropriate situation, we happily declare that these events are among those brought by reaction in this period revolution which is universal, they will not survive in the coming period and humanity will vigorously embrace our social liberation by getting rid of these destructive and reactionary influences.*"<sup>167</sup>

Since 1913, the Hunchak Party held the line that it was necessary to engage in illegal activities against the Ottoman state. In the year the Ottomans decided to go to war, the Party accelerated its activities against the rulers (these were not related to the Volunteer Corps formed under the Russian armed forces mainly by the Caucasian Dashnaks). On June 14th 1915, 20 Hunchak militants were picked up from their homes for activities against the state and the war, and the next day were executed in Beyazit square in Constantinople. Mateos Sarkisian, also known as Paramaz, was to say as his final words on the gallows:

*"You can only make our bodies disappear, our ideal never. This ideal will be realized in the near future and the whole world will see it. Our ideal is socialism."*<sup>168</sup>



The 20 revolutionary militants hanged on the 15th June 1915 were the first martyrs of Ottoman socialism. Ignored today by the nationalist Turkish left and remembered only by Armenian nationalist organizations, these militants had with their final breath shouted their hope of a socialist future. For this, their memory truly belongs only to the international proletariat and will always remain so. But the genocide developing against the Armenians did force a decision on the Social Democrat Hunchak Party which throughout its history had zig-zagged between the

contradictory ideas of socialism and national liberation in its program and ended up a centrist grouping. 1914 did not cause a split between those who were against the war in general and those whose principal concern was the Ottoman state. But the intensification of the massacres targeting the Armenians sharpened these divisions, with opponents of the Ottoman state now defending joining the pro-Russian Armenian Volunteer Corps like the Caucasian Dashnaks. Events and the lack of a working class reaction turned the tide in their favor, and in a short time, those in the party against supporting Russia were declared traitors. Sapah-Gulian, now leader of the pro-Russian faction in the party, wrote:

*Now, instead of appreciating our works regarding the Armenian volunteer organization and expanding them, some sides, based on doctrinaire, childish views are arguing for closing down this organization, ending this. No! This is murder! We will not stop the Armenian volunteer organization, we will not end this, no, quite the contrary, we will intensify it till the end, we will increase it. We will be in the front everywhere as the leaders. Till the end, till the damnation, destruction of the enemy, with our muscles and chests we will be at the side of the Russian cossacks (...) Treacherous tongues making criticisms on the question of the volunteers should shut up, sinister hands should stop making disturbances! (...) Today our number one enemies are the Turks. Those against the volunteer organization, either secretly or openly, those who try to limit this forces are considered internal enemies"*<sup>169</sup>

Thus the Social Democrat Hunchak Party became yet another party of the Second International that betrayed the working class and internationalist principles by supporting the war. The leaders of the internal enemies mentioned by Sapah-Gulian were without doubt members of the revolutionary socialist organization. However, as the war and the genocides advanced, it wasn't really possible to conduct an effective opposition within a party which had chosen to actively integrate itself into the war effort; and those Hunchaks who did not go to war lacked an organization able to maintain underground political activity and were thus condemned to passivity. Not many who could lead such an opposition remained anyway: of the leading Armenian internationalists, the poet Ruben Sevak was among those arrested on April 24th 1915 and murdered in August; as for Gevorg 'Arkomedes' Gharadjian, he returned to the Caucasus. But it was the death of Karekin Kozikian which had the greatest impact for the Armenian revolutionary socialists. In the city of Trebizond, where he went to work as a teacher, Kozikian and his wife ended up jumping into a river in

167 "Ermeni Komitelerinin Emelleri ve İhtilal Hareketleri". Editor: Mehmet Kaynar. Der Yayınevi. Istanbul. 2001. s. 206-207

168 Çetinoğlu, Sait. "Türkiye 'Sol' Hareketlerinde Milliyetçi Virüs 2". <http://www.norzar-tonk.org/?p=3406>

169 "Ermeni Komitelerinin Emelleri ve İhtilal Hareketleri". Editor: Mehmet Kaynar. Der Yayınevi. Istanbul. 2001. p. 214



order to avoid capture. A militant worker, a leader of the printers' strikes in Constantinople and a revolutionary socialist devoted to internationalism, Kozikian was a tragic loss not only for the Armenian socialist movement but also for the Ottoman working class as a whole.<sup>170</sup>

The war also destroyed the revolutionary socialist organization which was suppressed, and the offices of the Constantinople Association of Unions were closed down. Many non-Muslim revolutionary socialists had to flee, and those who did not (or could not) were conscripted, under horrific conditions, and many perished during the war. A great majority of the workers from Muslim backgrounds influenced by the group were also conscripted and a significant number of them died also.<sup>171</sup> The catastrophe of war and the catastrophe of genocide was a catastrophe for Ottoman socialism as well. And yet, despite everything, despite their limited influence due to their weakness, here and there the remaining revolutionary socialists continued to defend internationalist principles and fought against the imperialist war.<sup>172</sup> When the war ended there was neither a workers' organization nor an effective revolutionary structure left in the Ottoman Empire. Yet in a short time it would turn out that they had not disappeared without touching the course of history. The Ottoman Empire was no more, nor were the Constantinople Association of Unions, the Socialist Center of Constantinople, or the Socialist Party of Turkey. Kozikian and Sivachev were dead, Glavinov was in Sofia, Gharadjian was in the Caucasus, Papadopoulos was in Greece and Vezesthenis had fled to America. On the other hand, the spark lit by a numerically small but principled and determined group of militants had, without being able to burn down the bourgeoisie of Constantinople, nevertheless spread considerably. And despite the fact that a large number of the workers defending internationalist socialism had died during the war, or were in exile or at least cut off from the movement, it would soon turn out that the embers of internationalism were still alive. The first communists of Turkey and Constantinople were to come from the tradition that had lit those flames.

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170 Çetinoğlu, Sait. "Türkiye 'Sol' Hareketlerinde Milliyetçi Virüs 1" and. "Türkiye 'Sol' Hareketlerinde Milliyetçi Virüs 2". <http://www.norzar-tonk.org/?p=3401> and <http://www.norzar-tonk.org/?p=3406>

171 Ginzberg, Roland. "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı A". "Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı (Mütareke İstanbulu'nda Rum Ağırlıklı Bir İşçi Örgütü ve TKP ile İlişkileri)". Editor: Erden Akbulut and Mete Tunçay. Sosyal Tarih Yayınları. 2009. İstanbul. p. 46

172 Dimitrov, Georgi. "The European War and the Labour Movement in the Balkans". The Communist International. 1924, No. 5 (New Series), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1924/x01.htm>