

“We come to bury the Turkish Republic, not to praise it”

Fundamentalism, nationalism and Militarism in Turkey

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THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT and the military are preparing to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. In relation to this so-called “glorious” event, the government even plans to introduce a new amnesty law for prisoners-political prisoners, for example, prisoners of conscience, radical Leftists, Kurdish resisters, and Islamists are, of course, not included. Although some of our Leftists are very willing to join in these “pious orgies,” the Turkish Republic in fact established itself with the blood and tears of the oppressed.

Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) had founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923 upon six principles: republicanism, laicism, reformism, nationalism, populism, and statism. Under the Kemalist regime the State was set free from the dominance of religion and religion was put under the control of the State. Especially the ideas of Republicanism, Laicism, and Reformism were made good use of by the Kemalist élite to oppress people of Islamic faith. The relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed generally involves both oppression and resistance. But the relationship between Kemalists and Islamists in Turkey, as we will see, does not only consist in that: they also tend to exploit each other to achieve their ends.

Islamic reaction in Turkey manifested itself through two channels: rebellion of the conservative Islamic masses and the Islamist political movement. People’s discontent during the first decades of the Republic usually took the form of spontaneous explosions of anger on the part of the conservative Islamic masses, who were mainly illiterate and influenced to a great degree by religious sentiments. The Rebellion of Sheikh Said in 1925, which was a rebellion of Sunni Kurds in the Turkish Southeast, is a good example. The army murderously put down both smaller and bigger scale rebellions, including the Rebellion of Sheikh Said. Hundreds of people who rose in opposition or armed resistance against the prevailing social and political order were sentenced to death in arbitrary and hasty trials.

The Islamist political movement, on the other hand, rather than coming into conflict with the State, sought allies within the ruling élite by adopting a moderate line. After the Second World War the change from a one-party to a multi-party system {this parliamentary change resulted in a split within the ruling élite: on the one hand, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) that was the

ruling party, and on the other, the DP that emerged from within a faction in the CHP} allowed the Islamist movement to find an ally in the Democratic Party (DP). In order to gain most of the votes of people in rural areas, the DP sought to take the Islamist movement under its auspices, and won the general election in 1950 by a wide margin. But after the overthrow of the DP by a military coup d'état on May 27, 1960, it was the Justice Party (AP) inheriting the politics of the banned DP that won once again the general election in 1965. The AP utilised both the conservative Islamic masses and the Islamist movement as street forces against the rising youth and workers' movements. Merchants from the provinces who became richer under the auspices of the AP encouraged and funded the offensive actions of those (artisans, small tradesmen, and people from rural regions who gave up all hopes in the future) who were getting poorer and angrier because of the growing economic pressures and who in the last resort dropped the anchor of religion.

In 1969, the leaders of the Islamist movement who had hitherto organised under the umbrella of AP felt that they were enough powerful to form their own party, which was called the National Order Party (MNP). However, on March 12, 1971, the military staged another coup d'état, crushed the revolutionary movement, and suppressed the MNP: the military which had previously turned a blind eye when the Islamist movement was being used by the State against the revolutionary movement viewed the aim of the Islamist movement to gain the majority in the parliament as a threat.

During the 1970s the State continued with its policy of utilising the fanatic Islamic sections of society against the revolutionary movement. Especially in rural towns the State deliberately provoked conservative Sunni people to organise pogroms under the leadership of the Grey Wolves-members of the fascist party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)-against a particular heretic sect in Islam religion commonly known as Alevi people. The so-called "non-modernist" Islamist movement gathered its most powerful forces in the 1980s, when the so-called "counter-fundamentalist" Kemalist military made yet another coup d'état on September 12, 1980. The military supported the Islamist movement, despite all its "modernist" discourse, and thus benefited from that movement's ideological power to control and pacify the people. The Islamist movement, on the other hand, was not at all reluctant to make use of every opportunity the State offered for its purpose of climbing the ladder of power.

Unfortunately, even people among Marxist intellectuals and Leftists in Turkey fail to understand the true basis of the Laicism-versus-Islamism conflict in depth-an important issue today that dominates the ideological and political agenda of Turkey-and persist in taking the army's side in this conflict. The fact remains that this is fundamentally a power struggle between two forces, which are not principally very different from each other, rather than being a conflict between the two systems. The modernist army is as conservative as the Islamist movement and the political cadres of the Islamist movement are as much modernist as the army. In other words, the power struggle is between the two political forces both of which are modernist-conservative.

For this reason, it can be said that the Islamist movement in Turkey is fundamentally different from the fundamentalist movement in Algeria and Iran. A considerable number of people from the prominent section of the Islamist movement are businessmen. Some are still working in the State institutions. Fundamentalist elements in the movement are marginalised. Unlike the leaders of the fundamentalist movement in Algeria, Islamist leaders in Turkey are in no position to fight to the death, because their social and political roles do not allow them to confront the State. Moreover, they have close links with Saudi Arabia whose integration with the world's capitalist

system is the highest among the Islamic countries. This is another factor that reduces the degree of radicalism in the movement. One of the most important characteristics of the Islamist movement in Turkey is that Islamists, whose long-term aim is to form a religious State such as the Iranian one, instead of coming into conflict with the State, seek to make the Islamist ideology and lifestyle embedded in all areas of society—from education to fashion, from intellectual life to sport, from the media to sexual life—by trying to adjust Islamic values to the process of modernisation. By these efforts they attempt to establish their ideological hegemony in the society and then conquer the State, unlike Jacobin-Kemalists who seek to establish their ideological hegemony in the society by means of the State. In this sense, the long and bitter conflict between Kemalists and Islamists both of whom are oppressive and monolithic is a struggle for ideological hegemony as well as for political power. Kemalists appear now to have taken over the lead in the struggle for ideological hegemony thanks to the media, the military and the education system. For example, the media tries to create a wave of secular-patriotic hysteria in the society, similar to the anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s in the McCarthy's America. In the 1980s, the Islamist current, on the one hand, managed to strengthen its ranks among people of Islamic faith, who were reacting against the Kemalist dictatorship, and on the other, gained greatly from the level of protection and subsequent opportunities the same dictatorship offered. From the mid-1990s onwards the Islamist movement, organised under the Welfare Party (RP), was to gain more than 30 per cent of the votes and be the biggest right-wing party (being the biggest right-wing party means being the majority in the parliament). They, therefore, decided to drop their forty-years-old role of being an instrument at the hands of the ruling élite and lay claim to a direct share in power. The Generals leading the army had been accustomed to sharing power for fifty years with the leadership of the DP-AP tradition, members of whom were themselves not Islamists but still flirting with them. In the 1980s, after the military junta closed down the AP, this tradition was divided in two: the Motherland Party (ANAP) and the True Path Party (DYP). Owing to this important change the Generals panicked and felt that their positions in the power structure were threatened. In this situation, the militarist clique began to consolidate the dictatorship, seeking the tacit support of Alevi people who were the target of fundamentalist attacks, some parts of the Left, and the middle classes. Moreover, by putting tanks in the streets and using the power of the National Security Council, a body that legitimises army interventions in government business, the militarist clique made a “post-modernist coup d'état” in February 1997, suppressed the Islamist RP with a rigid anti-fundamentalist propaganda that reminds us the early period-1920s and 1930s-of the Kemalist dictatorship. But the RP whose main tactic has always been to obey the Generals chose to calm its followers and supporters, and began to wait for the future times when the secular dictatorship would loosen its grip and perhaps need RP again.

Nationalism, Populism, and Statism, the other three principles upon which the Republic was established, are merely expressions of repression against various ethnic groups and nationalities, in particular Kurds who live within the national borders of Turkey, and against Turkish Cypriots who live in Northern Cyprus, occupied since 1974 by the Turkish army. It was the ruling Committee of Union and Progress that first put the Nation State's racist politics into practice during the First World War—the last period of the Ottoman Empire—by exterminating Armenian people in 1915, who were in substantial numbers mainly in the East and Northeast. “Estimates of the Armenians killed in the deportations and massacres of 1915–1916 range from a few hundred thousands to 1,500,000.” When the Republic was founded, the Kemalist ruling élite inherited

the same racist politics, and there were several uprisings and rebellions in Kurdistan, the most important of which are the Rebellion of Sheikh Said in 1925 and the Dersim Rebellion in 1938.

Unlike the Islamist movement, the Kurdish political movement, pioneered by Kurdish intellectuals, could not find any allies within the élite, and had to endure repression for many years. Only in the 1960s when the Turkish Left began to rise was it able to open up and express itself to a certain degree. In the 1970s, various Kurdish nationalist groups from different tendencies, not having found in the Turkish Leftist movement a platform on which they could declare their own cultural and national demands, separated from the Left and experienced an organisational preliminary period to assert their rights for independence or autonomy. One of these groups, the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK), however, rather than attacking the Turkish State, began to eliminate rival Kurdish and Turkish organisations of the Left, and thus established its power base in the region and dominated the area by force. It is interesting to point out that the State ignored the PKK's actions and followed a policy of non-interference. The fact that the PKK and other groups were fighting and destroying each other did not matter much for the State.

With the military coup d'état of 12 September, 1980, the Generals tried to militarise the whole society. The aim of this Latin American type of coup d'état, which came later in Turkey than in some Latin American countries, where the militaries were retreating back to the barracks, was to gag the people. Did they achieve it? No. On the contrary, such an appalling atmosphere of oppression created among the people a feverish desire for freedom and democracy. The reason, therefore, for the collapse of the Turkish Left after the 1980s, which was dominated by Stalinism, should be attributed to this desire for freedom and democracy rather than to the military's attacks on the Left. It was inevitable that the Leftist organisations would lose their "charm" particularly in the eyes of Leftist people, considering that these organisations ignored and scorned the idea of freedom, individual initiative and organisational democracy, while they praised "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and "the vanguard party." This led to the emergence of anarchism, feminism and other currents such as libertarian socialism. The number of people who sympathised with such currents increased in the 1980s, particularly in big cultural centres such as Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir. Such ideals were favoured more than others, because the idea of freedom and individual initiative was important. Of course, there were differences between the big cities in western Turkey and the rural areas in Kurdistan in terms of what people felt and heard and what kind of existence they led. The general atmosphere of terror and repression together with the racist practices of the Turkish State made life extremely unbearable for the Kurdish people. In such circumstances, in which there was no alternative other than to support the PKK, the desire for freedom of the Kurdish masses was channelled into this organisation, where not a vestige of freedom could be found.

The PKK began its guerrilla war in the mid-1980s, when the military was still in power and the regime looked as powerful and intact as before. The Kurdish masses responded positively and gave active support to the PKK. The PKK found its most active supporters and followers among young people in rural areas who had no possibility of employment and lost all hopes in the future. The guerrilla warfare and the number of deaths on both sides reached their peak in the early 1990s, when the Turkish State decided to curb all the guerrillas, their followers, and supporters by counter-guerrilla war. The State organised its own Secret Gangs, backed by the Army, its own Secret Police and Gendarmerie to murder thousands of Kurdish people. Between 1990 and 1996 thousands of villages in the Southeast were either destroyed or burnt down. People were forced to leave their villages, and if they did not, they were brutally killed. Many "disappeared" and

their murderers-Secret State Gangs' members-were sheltered and protected by the State itself. Despite all this, the guerrilla movement did not stop; on the contrary, it grew.

However, after the Susurluk scandal in 1996, the PKK leadership, which was under the influence of Yalçın Küçük (a Stalinist writer and a supporter of Kemalism, who worked as an expert at the Institute of State Planning in the 1960s), seemed to believe that the military had shifted its policy and was now willing to give some concessions to the Kurdish guerrilla movement. The PKK henceforth sought to reach a compromise.

Until the Susurluk scandal, the Generals had been in close collaboration with the then ruling party (DYP) and the police in order to destroy the Kurdish guerrilla movement. But after the general election in 1995, this collaboration changed into a quarrel between the Generals leading the army and the DYP, because the DYP now engaged in a coalition with the Islamist RP. This angered the Generals. They blamed the DYP for all the failure of their bloody war against Kurds and for the murders committed by Secret State Gangs. The Susurluk scandal created an unmissable opportunity for the military to overthrow the DYP-RP coalition. (We have mentioned this "post-modernist coup d'état" above.)

The PKK still proceeds with its policy of compromise. However, army operations in the Kurdish regions near or over the Iraqi border have increased, and the PKK leadership seems to be disillusioned because of this, though they have not changed their idea of coming to an agreement. The army, on the other hand, seems as if it does not wish to end this war. It is obvious that the prolongation of the war on a certain level serves the army to pay its high debts, but most importantly, to determine the political life of the country. It is the young, the poor and the oppressed in Turkey and Kurdistan who perish everyday that pay the price of this bloody war. The fact is that the Turkish army tends to recruit its soldiers among the poor young people. The rich always avoid joining the army by "legal" ways and those who happen to join find their own ways (personal contacts with elite bureaucrats) not to go to the front. Many poor young people refuse to be part of this injustice and brutal savagery. There are more than 300,000 deserters in Turkey and this number seems to be on the increase.

Wars are the grave-diggers of revolution and they result in more despotic regimes for both sides. Even if wars may result in revolutions, in the last analysis they destroy them. (The First World War resulted in the Russian Revolution, but the Civil War destroyed it.) The war in Kurdistan not only militarises every cell of the society, but causes in the long term the complete paralysis of society as regards violence. It not only creates and feeds chauvinistic feelings among Turkish and Kurdish people, but helps an authoritarian sentiment spread, to the detriment of the cause of freedom. All this makes it necessary for us to be more active in the struggles to stop the war. The Turkish army must stop all its operations in Kurdistan. We have always been in support of the struggle of Kurdish people against the Nation State. This, however, does not mean we support nationalist and patriotic feelings of the oppressed people, nor does it mean we support the PKK, an organisation that wants to create its own State.

As Turkish and Kurdish anarchists we also oppose the colonialist policy of the Turkish State as well as its policy of assimilation, settlement, and forced immigration against Turkish Cypriots in Northern Cyprus. We believe that Turkish and Greek Cypriots can solve their own disputes among themselves without any outside intervention and without any manipulation in regard to this or that Cypriot government. The concept of nation is an imaginary concept often employed by ruling élites as the basis of their power structure as well as by aspirant cliques to deceive oppressed minorities. For this reason, we believe not in the so-called self-determination of an

imaginary “nation,” but in the self-government of voluntary individuals, groups and communities, working and unwaged people, etc.

It is crucial for Turkish, Kurdish, and Greek peoples to be in solidarity with each other against the expansionist and chauvinist policies of the Turkish and Greek States. It is, therefore, important to strengthen the existing links between Turkish, Greek, and Kurdish anarchists.

The people who live within the borders of Turkey have been under the dictatorship of the Kemalist élite for 75 years. The main principle of this dictatorship is called Statism that means domination rather than an economic form of governance by the State. The State continually interferes with our liberty: on the one hand, they say that women should not veil themselves, and on the other, they attempt to check whether female high school students are virgins or not. Everything is dominated by the State, including the media, labour unions, and some parts of the Left. The media is the most important and effective instrument of the present regime to brainwash people into accepting their traditional roles. People, whether they be political or not, are tortured systematically in many police stations and prisons. The patriarchal State indirectly justifies domestic violence against women and children. Workers and peasants are oppressed and exploited as long as the State exists. Poor people who flow day by day into the big cities because of the war in Kurdistan are in desperate situation.

Some of the Left such as the Worker Party (IP) have become organs of the State. Members of IP now carry Turkish flags in demonstrations and attack other organisations of the Left which are in opposition to them. IP also has relations with some factions of the fascist Grey Wolves. Another party, the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP), is a coalition of some Leftist factions. Although it fights against the State to defend democratic rights, it does not go beyond the confines of western democracy.

On the other hand, the radical Left, whose enemy is the Kemalist State, is unfortunately narrow-minded and cannot somehow rescue itself from the Stalinist tradition. According to each organisation of the radical Left, the revolution will only happen, if “the party of the proletariat” gains strength after strength. (There is no disagreement whatsoever among them with regard to this point.) It is ironic that there are so many so-called “parties of the proletariat” which are deadly enemies competing with each other for power. But only a revolution built upon the self-initiative of the masses and individuals and without these self-indulgent parties is likely to be successful.

The era of parties has ended. Even their members and followers agree on the fact that all parties are miniature versions of the tyrannical States and bureaucracies of the future. In this regard, what is dead is not only Marxism, but also liberalism, the creator of party systems. This also explains the new interest in anarchist ideas.

We have so far drawn a negative picture of Turkey. It should not be understood from what we have said that the society is under the total control of the State. Despite everything, people resist to the present regime in various ways and forms; and the parliament, the fig-leaf of the dictatorship, is losing its credibility in the eyes of people. In 1995, for example, Alevi people in the Gazi district of Istanbul spontaneously rebelled against the local authorities because of the murders committed by the secret police. There were violent clashes between the police and people for three days. 22 people died and many were injured. In this uprising Alevi people organised their own independent networks to fight against the authorities. Another example of self-organisation is the ecological resistance movement of the Bergama peasants and town people in the form of very creative and imaginative demonstrations against the gold mines run

by the Eurogold Company. The Bergama people organised themselves on their own initiative and did not care what their so-called “leaders” said or did.

Nobody except for Bergama peasants and their creative minds could have thought of an illegal demonstration on the Bosphorus Bridge where hundreds of women and men protested half-naked against the government and the Eurogold Company. One of the most interesting aspects of this struggle is the spiritual driving force of the women involved who could neither read nor write. A third example is the Human Rights Association (IHD) that publicises tortures and “disappearances,” despite all the attacks of the police and the media. (Its president, Akın Birdal, was recently seriously injured in an attempted assassination.) The significance of this organisation lies in its brave and uncompromising attitude against political prejudices and nationalist public hysteria. There are also the “Saturday Mothers” who come together every Saturday in the Galatasaray avenue to ask for their “disappeared” children and relatives. The fight of Osman Murat Ülke, a conscientious objector and an activist from Izmir War Resisters (ISK), is also important, because Murat Ülke confronts the huge military machine as an individual and shows to everyone that the individual who has decided to resist is stronger than any weapon.

When we were preparing this paper for publication, another scandal occurred in Turkey: one of the most notorious Turkish mafia bosses, Alaaddin Çakıcı, was caught and arrested in Paris. On him was found a red passport—red passports are usually only given to high-ranking diplomats—given to him by the National Intelligence Service (MIT). It was also found out that before he was caught he exchanged several phone calls with two ministers of the present government of which the military is in control.

The Turkish State is involved in “dirty-work” jobs, including drug trafficking, without which the economy may collapse. It becomes clearer everyday that politicians, the MIT, the police and the military are working with the mafia; that some of the Turkish mafia bosses are even members of the MIT. It is known that Mahmut Yildirim (code-name “Green”), a mass murderer who is “looked for” by the police, will not be caught, because from the beginning he has been protected by the State.

Corruption goes hand in hand with expansionism. The State corruption is linked with the expansionist policies of the Turkish military. The Generals who are in collaboration with the US and Israel proudly declare that Turkish military forces have the power to occupy several parts of the Middle East, the Balkans, or Caucasio.

It would be best to bury the 75 year old Republic where it belongs, just next to the grave of the Ottoman Empire. Amen to that.

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