Captive Bolshevik: Nâzım Hikmet and Stalinism

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I got back from Cuba this morning
in the space that is Cuba six million people whites blacks yellows mulattoes are planting a
bright seed the seed of seeds joyously

can you paint happiness Abidin
but without taking the easy way out
not the angel-faced mother nursing her rosy-cheeked baby
nor the apples on white cloth
nor the goldfish darting among aquarium bubbles
can you paint happiness Abidin
can you paint Cuba in midsummer 1961
master can you paint Praise be praise be I saw the day I could die now and not be sorry
can you paint What a pity what a pity I could have been born in Havana this morning[1]

"they strove to tear me away from my party/to no avail/nor was I crushed

1 From the poem "Straw-Blond", *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet*, Translated from the Turkish by Randy Blasing & Mutlu Konuk, New York: Persea Books, 2002, p. 253.

beneath the fallen idols"[2] These verses are from the famous poem of Nâzım Hikmet titled "Autobiography". It ought to entice all who know him to stop and ask: Who was it that strove to tear Nâzım away from his party, that is the Communist Party of Turkey? Even more enigmatic is the last line: What fallen idols is Nâzım talking about and, above all, why has he not been crushed underneath those fallen idols? Perhaps also intriguingly, who was it that was crushed beneath those idols? And what exactly are the fallen idols themselves? This article is an attempt to search for the preliminary elements of an answer to those questions.

But let us address a warning to our foreign reader from the outset concerning the limitations of this English version of what in Turkish is an article close to 60 pages. Translating such a long article in full into English is an overwhelming task for a militant that has to divide his available time between writing about and fighting against the world as it exists. Even if we had all the time in the world, a word for word translation would not be meaningful, since many things about Nâzım Hikmet or the communist movement in Turkey that are common knowledge for Turkish readers would sound Greek to foreign readers, especially the youth, who are being politically and theoretically educated in a world where the Soviet Union, and together with it many of the so-called "communist" parties affiliated to it, are no more, including the Communist Party of Turkey.

Let us quickly clarify the objectives of the original article in Turkish and then move on to the real focus of this English version. Nâzım Hikmet, one of the best poets, in our humble opinion, not only of Turkey but worldwide in the 20th century, happened to be a political militant, a communist in the true sense of the term, all his life (1902-1963). Because he is such a powerful figure in Turkish political and cultural life and also because he lived a real martyr's life, spending 14 years of his rather brief life in prison and 12 years in forced exile, all those who consider themselves progressives try to appropriate him to their cause. This has gone so far that, in the 1990s, even the historic leader of Turkish fascism, Alparslan Türkeş, quoted a single stanza of his poetry during one of his speeches (to which the author of these lines responded by challenging the said leader to continue reciting the same poem, where Nâzım makes perfectly clear his communism).

Leaving aside such extreme instances, it is the Kemalists that try to appropriate Nâzım. This is the intellectual, cultural and ideological current fashioned after the bourgeois revolutionary leader in the first quarter of the 20th century, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a current that still regurgitates endlessly the catechism of the early republican period (roughly the second quarter of the 20th century), without any attention paid to the relevance of those ideas for the new world and domestic situation and without any mention of the crimes committed, especially against the Kurds, during the construction of the modern Turkish economy and the state.

2 Our translation.

The original of the present article is a fully-fledged rebuttal of the idea that Nâzım Hikmet was, in any sense of the term, a Kemalist or bore sympathy to the Kemalist movement. This is one aspect of the Turkish original of the article that will be left out from the much shorter English version you are reading. Let it be said in passing that, both as a young man, during the early 1920s, and at the end of his life in his autobiographical novel, titled *Living is So Beautiful, Brother* (in Turkish), Nâzım comes back ceaselessly to the assassination of the leaders of the young Communist Party of Turkey, with the historic leader Mustafa Suphi at their head, briefly after their arrival in Turkey from Soviet territory in order to shoulder the Turkish national liberation struggle being waged by a variety of forces. The responsibility of the Kemalist leadership in Ankara in this massacre has not been demonstrated, but it itself had not been acting kindly, to put it mildly, to the communist leadership and may be said to have, at least, prepared the political and psychological atmosphere that facilitated the tragic outcome. None of the Kemalists of course even mentions this episode, of immense importance to us Turkish communists.

But the more important discussion that we take up in the original article is the position of Nâzım in relation to Stalinism. Nâzım became a member of the Communist Party of Turkey (henceforth TKP, the initials of the party in Turkish) when he was 19 and died as a member of the party bearing the same name, but metamorphosed into a Stalinist party, as a man of 61. This gives ample opportunity to Stalinists of all persuasions to own Nâzım as one of theirs. It is (or rather was until recently) commonplace for Stalinists to heap praise on Nâzım's communism without any regard for the very clear evidence that the poet militant had very strong objections to many aspects of what Stalinists conceive as communism.

What we tried to do in the original version of this article was to show that at least in two phases of his life Nâzım was a powerful critic of the general line, first of his own party, and later of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. We believe it is worth telling this story to all Marxists around the world, so in this English version of the article, we will focus on this aspect alone. The question of Stalinism is of universal importance, while the question of Kemalism has limited import for the international audience. Hence we will use our time resources towards what we think is the more judicious end, that of discussing Nâzım's position in the debate on Stalin and Stalinism.

So this article will be a partial summary of the original version focusing on the question of Stalinism. In order to keep it to manageable proportions, we will avoid some of the finer arguments in the original as well as some of the historical evidence and only put forward the general argument. For as opposed to writing for the Turkish audience, some of the discussion on evidence would have required ample explanation as to context, personalities etc. which would have taken us far afield. We will also have to omit some references (which are

exclusively to sources in Turkish) along with, unfortunately, some of the poetry cited. We nonetheless hope that the end result will not be as dry as it may sound at this stage, since we believe that even the barest outline of Nâzım's trajectory has some very intriguing aspects.

Before proceeding further let us warn the foreign reader of another serious limitation, concerning this time not the present article but our topic: the scarcity of documentation relevant to our subject matter. This is due to a variety of reasons. One is the fact that the communist movement was always persecuted by the Kemalists and their successors. In particular, after 1925 communism became an entirely underground movement in Turkey. This meant that written documents were difficult to store, that they were pillaged and destroyed by the police during raids, that some were taken abroad for purposes of archiving etc. On the other hand, the Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union meant that Soviet archives were also unreliable and whole dossiers inaccessible. Add to this the fact that, apart from a handful of pioneers to whom we are grateful for their research despite the methodological mistakes they have committed, academic historians have kept their distance from a movement that has been ostracised and pushed underground. A study of first-hand historical sources is still to be done. We are confident that many of the unorthodox views propounded in this article will be vindicated when these sources are brought to daylight.

It would be to the benefit of both the author and the reader to state from the outset the main novel points of the article in this area. First, we contend that Nâzım Hikmet was an **anti-Stalinist revolutionary communist**. This attitude finds its first expression in his practice of organising what has been called the "Opposition TKP" as opposed to the "Conformable TKP", which was the party that was officially recognised by the Comintern. But it was given even clearer form in his critical outlook on the Soviet regime after he took refuge in the Soviet Union in 1951.

Secondly, this attitude was, of course, a product of the worldview of Nâzım Hikmet that was revolutionary through and through. This worldview was deeply influenced by the historically specific way he came to communism. Let us put it more clearly: it was because Nâzım became a communist in Moscow in the glorious early days of the October revolution under Lenin and Trotsky that he was not fit for cutting to size according to the precepts of the bureaucracy and its Stalinist leadership.

Third, despite this, he composed with the Stalinist bureaucracy at different stages of his political life and carried on as its hostage, whether willingly or forced to do so. And finally, he made grave mistakes as a revolutionary communist with respect to both Stalinism and Kemalism (although we will not dwell on the latter in this English version).

We are of the opinion that political errors committed by poets, literary people,

or artists should be handled with much greater latitude than leaders of political parties or Marxist theoreticians. But we do not apply this yardstick to Nâzım, since he is not simply a poet, but a leader, in his time, of Turkish communism or, in other words, a representative of the historical programme of the proletariat. Hence, we have to be critical regarding his errors as well as praising his achievements. Respect for Nâzım's communism requires no less than this critical attitude.

Periodisation

Nâzım was born in Salonica under the Ottoman Empire, lived in Istanbul in the time remaining to him outside of prison (where he spent overall 14 years), but also resided for long periods of time in Moscow, both as a young man and in his latter days. We will now make an attempt toward a periodisation of this eventful life from the political standpoint.

The first period is the one when he received his political education in Moscow at the Communist University of Eastern Peoples, the KUTV in its Russian initials, between 1921 and 1924. This is followed by a long period between 1925 and 1936 that is characterised by his opposition to the political line of the officially recognised party. Nâzım then changes his attitude into one of willing submission to the official line, moves to the camp of the majority of the party, and hence of the leadership of the Comintern (1937-1951). The period he spends in the Soviet Union (1951-1963) is a period onto its own. During this period, he survives restlessly in the Soviet system, cooperating with it when need be, but also wages a struggle in opposition to Stalinism. One might distinguish a sub-period in this overall time span, that between 1961 and his death in 1963, when he regains confidence in the revolution, fired by his brief experience in Cuba.

These are the periods we will be taking up one by one in what follows.

A special kind of Marxism: apprenticeship under Lenin and Trotsky (1921-1924)

We will not dwell at length on the very important topic of which of the two revolutions that Nâzım witnessed in his youth, the Turkish and the Soviet revolutions, he bore the mark. Let us just say briefly that the literature in Turkish on Nâzım simply disregards this extremely interesting question. Trotsky somewhere said that the October revolution found its painter in a distant land, Mexico, in the person of Diego Rivera. We believe that had he known Nâzım's poetry, he would have said the same of Nâzım in the domain of poetry (not forgetting even for a moment the importance of the great Mayakovsky, who, unfortunately, left us tragically early).

Nâzım had left Istanbul, accompanied by his best friend Vâ-Nû, in order to participate in the war of liberation of Turkey led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, then

centred in Ankara. However, the two friends turned away in disgust at the crying class character of the entire movement. Having witnessed the poverty of the peasantry and the utter disregard for this among the bourgeois leadership of the movement, they decided to pass over to the land of the October revolution. In his autobiographic novel, Nâzım gives us a glimpse of how he became a communist in quite an emotional manner:

> It was neither through books nor propaganda by word of mouth, nor even my social position that I came to where I am now… It was Anatolia that brought me where I am. Anatolia that I only fleetingly observed. It was my heart that brought me where I am… That's what it is…[3]

Just like thousands of youth from around the world, Nâzım learned Marxism not only intellectually, but by breathing the whole atmosphere of revolutionary Russia, by experiencing firsthand the new socio-economic relations that were being built, by becoming, so to speak, students of Lenin and Trotsky. Between 1921 and 1924, he attended the KUTV, where students from many countries were being educated. He also performed the practical tasks that the party, the Bolshevik Party of which he had become a member, assigned to him. In January 1924, he stood guard over Lenin's coffin at his funeral ceremony. Nâzım's communism is a product of this whole experience, which left an indelible influence on him throughout his life. Even when he drifted away from Leninism, especially on questions of strategy and tactics, he was going to conserve that Bolshevik kernel of Marxism to his last days.

Moscow in the early 1920s was a city full of revolutionary enthusiasm, probably to an extent never again equalled in later revolutionary periods. The will power that went into the construction of socialism, the tangible importance of workers' democracy in daily life, the impressive creativity and liveliness that marked cultural life, never again to be witnessed in future revolutions to the same extent, the effort of the Bolsheviks, in particular of Lenin and Trotsky, to apply Marxism creatively not only in politics but in every sphere of life—all these will inevitably leave traces very difficult to forget on the mind of a young student, especially for a genius like Nâzım.

One particular aspect of this Marxism, entirely incompatible with the later Stalinism, is its internationalism. The conception of "national communism" that Stalinism infused into Marxism both in the Soviet Union and, later, in other countries is entirely alien to Nâzım. He remained **an intransigent internationalist** throughout his life. This internationalism is so deeply ingrained in Nâzım's Marxism that the concepts of "world revolution" and "world communism",

3 Nâzım Hikmet, *Yaşamak Güzel Şey Be Kardeşim*, Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2013, p. 32.

driven from Marxism and Leninism, but branded as "Trotskyist" concepts by the Stalinist bureaucracy, lived on in Nâzım's thinking to the end.

Before concluding this section, it would be useful to say a few words on Nâzım's relation to Trotsky in his period of Marxist formation. Nâzım had an extremely high esteem for this historic figure of the revolution in those days. A piece he wrote for a Turkish daily newspaper upon his return from the Soviet Union in 1924, reprinted in the Turkish version of this journal,[4] shows unambiguously this assessment. In the memoirs of Vâ-Nû, his comrade and friend at the KUTV, the admiration that both friends had for Trotsky is explicitly mentioned.[5] A poem he wrote upon his return to Istanbul, titled "Farewell", has four historic figures mentioned: "We loved/and still love you/the way your bullet-wounded walls/love the picture of Marx…" "Russia/As we depart from you/ in our mind we keep/ immortal memories/ like Engels' materialism!" "Russia/ Lenin's country,/ we saw in you how/the power of rampant masses reached full maturity!" And finally: "We saw your May Days!/ We heard through hum and noise/ Trotsky bursting forth like a big bell!"[6]

To sum up, Nâzım became a Marxist in the fire and fury of the October revolution. He himself was infatuated with this transformation. His poem "My nineteenth year" is a striking account of this whole experience. This was written in 1930, after some of his comrades from the KUTV defected from communism to the Kemalist party in power and after Vâ-Nû, the closest friend of his youthful days, abandoned politics and withdrew to a routine life. In this poem he sees the year 1921, when he met communism, as his "mother". Then he goes on to write: "My first child, first teacher, first comrade/ my 19th year/ I respect you as I respect my mother/ and I will do so/ I am following the road you first tread/ and I will do so. / My first child, first teacher, first comrade, my 19th year."

This he wrote when he was 28. Then in 1961, at the age of 59, two years before his death, he described his 19th year in the following manner in a letter:

> It was towards the end of 1921, I was amazed a thousand times. I felt an admiration and affection a hundred times stronger. Because I witnessed a fight waged against a world a hundred times stronger. And I saw an infinite hope and infinite joy of living and creating. I found a humanity that was entirely different.

4 Nâzım Hikmet, "Bolşevikler Arasında – Troçki ve Bolşevizm", *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 20, Spring 2014.

5 Vâ-Nû, *Bu Dünyadan Nâzım Geçti*, Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 2009, pp. 303-309.

6 Our translation. This version cited in Emin Karaca, *"Sevdalınız Komünisttir". Nâzım Hikmet'in Siyasal Yaşamı*, Istanbul: Gendaş Kültür, p. 62-64 and Vâ-Nû, ibid, p. 304. In subsequent publications, Trotsky's name was omitted for reasons that are easy to understand and the words "Kızıl Meydan" (Red Square) inserted instead.

And I started to write in another form.[7]

This is what made Nâzım a dedicated communist even at the threshold of his death.

A left opposition within Turkish communism (1925-1936)

The standard narrative on Nâzım involves no information that could make sense of the line "they strove to tear me away from my party" in his "Autobiography". Authors who attribute some importance to questions pertaining to the history of the left in Turkey naturally pay some attention to the fact that Nâzım formed an opposition to the TKP at a certain stage, but never delve into the political bases of this opposition.

What is often mentioned is the following. In the summer of 1929, Nâzım and some of his comrades organized a meeting, which led to the emergence of two different poles in Turkish communism: the "Opposition TKP" and the "Conformable TKP". The more enigmatic term, in its Turkish version as well, is "conformable". Even to pose the question "conformable to what?" gives us the clue to the answer: to the Comintern leadership of the period and the political line it was pursuing. The Eastern Bureau of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (widely known as EKKI) stigmatized Nâzım and the entire Opposition from the outset and stood by the leader of the official party, Şefik Hüsnü. The Opposition was attacked in terms that are simply astounding. In an "Open Letter", for instance, penned in July 1930, the oppositionists were characterized as "defeatists, Trotskyists, …, some undercover police agents, …, Kemalism's men, …, serving the interests of the bourgeoisie and the feudal lords…" Later on, the characterization changes to "the party of police provocation" and the claim is made that this party is "directly linked to the police". There are "turncoats such as Nâzım Hikmet" within this party of "renegades" and "undercover agents".[8] What were the bases of this rift, which provoked so much ire from the Comintern leadership? It should first be pointed out that there is a prehistory to this opposition by Nâzım to the TKP leadership, one that goes back all the way to the Third Congress of the Party in 1925.[9] This is a watershed year in the history of the republic that had been founded only two years before. The congress convened days after a landmark Kurdish revolt broke out. This turned out to be the event that brought a change of tide in the nature of the new republican state, which turned into a repressive single-party regime that attacked and crushed not

7 Cited in Hikmet Akgül, *Nâzım Hikmet. Siyasi Biyografi*, Istanbul: Chiviyazilari, 2002, p. 320.

8 *Komintern Belgelerinde Nâzım Hikmet* [Nâzım Hikmet in Comintern Documents], Erden Akbulut (ed.), Istanbul: TÜSTAV, 2002, pp. 164 ff.

9 See *Komintern Belgeleri*, ibid, pp. 30 and 37.

only the Kurdish revolt but the fledgling communist movement as well. Even at his early stage, Nâzım was of the opinion that Şefik Hüsnü and the rest of the leadership were too lenient on the bourgeois government of Mustafa Kemal. This meant that Nâzım was now defending a line that excluded any support to the bourgeoisie. The line of the more and more Stalinised TKP became, on the contrary, notorious for the full support it extended to the bourgeois government of Mustafa Kemal.

The real rift came to the surface during the 1926 Vienna Conference of the TKP. The repression had now been extended to the TKP, so that Nâzım adamantly defended the idea that the party needed to squarely oppose the government. According to him, having taken power the bourgeoisie had lost its democratic character and could not be supported any longer.[10] Not only that, but the working class should now go beyond the objective of a democratic revolution and fight for proletarian revolution.[11] The majority of the leadership came up against this change of line and claimed that the government ought to be supported because of its anti-imperialist stance. This position was laid out in the new party programme adopted at the Vienna Conference. Nâzım and his co-thinkers criticized this programme and the political line that it respresented precisely for this reason. However, on the technical side, it should be pointed out that the programme had not been ratified by the Comintern and, thus, from the legal point of view, had not yet come into effect according to the statutes of the Comintern.

The line defended by Şefik Hüsnü is totally adapted to the neo-Menshevik stance the Comintern had been developing since Lenin's death. The line pursued since 1925, particularly in China, led to the massacre of thousands of communists and workers during the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-1927. This line was going to be consolidated later in 1928 at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern through the wholesale revision of the programme of the International founded by Lenin on the basis of abandoning the perspective of world revolution in the name of building socialism in a single country. This new perspective was complemented with a programme of **revolution by stages** in countries subordinated to imperialism, the colonies and the semi-colonies of the time, from China, India, and Turkey all the way to Latin America, geared towards supporting the bourgeoisie in the supposed accomplishment of the democratic revolution, whereas in fact the real purpose was to avoid the pursuit of a revolutionary line by the communist parties of these countries. (The parallel policy in European

10 Y. Doğan Çetinkaya/M. Görkem Doğan, "TKP'nin Sosyalizmi (1920-1990)", *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce*, cilt 8: *Sol*, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008, p. 299.

11 For the testimony of two prominent communists of the time regarding this see Karaca, *"Sevdalınız Komünisttir"*, ibid, pp. 129 and 130-31. Furthermore, in a report that he presented years later Şefik Hüsnü also pointed out that the Opposition defended "proletarian revolution": see *Komintern Belgeleri*, ibid, p. 289.

countries will be the formation, in the mid-1930s, of Popular Fronts, i.e. fronts including bourgeois parties, rather than forming a United Workers' Front, the latter being a tactic developed in the time of Lenin.) In short, the priority given by the Stalinist bureaucracy to avoiding any risks regarding its own power in the Soviet Union found its counterpart in colonial and semi-coloial countries in the support extended to the forces of the bourgeoisie in the name supposedly of an anti-imperialist line.[12]

In Turkey, this line corresponded to the policy of Şefik Hüsnü and his co-thinkers while Nâzım's stance of working for proletarian revolution with the support of the peasantry is alien to it. To the extent that the historians of the Turkish left have not been able to discover this fundamental difference between the Opposition TKP and the Conformable TKP in good faith, this might be attributed to the fact that the Şefik Hüsnü faction was able to conceal its policy of class collaboration, that is to say its support for Kemalism, on the basis of a deliberate attempt at deception. The deception takes the form of revising the earlier programme in order to pretend that the party is for fighting against the Kemalist dictatorship so as to deprive the Opposition TKP of any basis for the criticism it kept levelling at the Conformable TKP.

In support of what we have said, in the Turkish version we cite several documents written by some of the leaders of the Conformable TKP. We will only translate the most important of those documents here.

Years later, Şefik Hüsnü, the major leader of the Conformable TKP, admits the real reason behind this more radical politics inserted in the new programme:

> … the Central Committee, in agreement with the external bureau, **taking into consideration the fact that the unprincipled opposition has speculated on the previous action programme of the party**, which was written in a period when the Kemalist party was only taking its first steps of compromise with imperialism, and contained certain favourable assessments regarding the government that could be interpreted as opportunistic, **decided to prepare a new action programme**. A programme of action, together with theses on the national revolution and on Turkey's economic and political situation, was presented to the approval of the Communist International in early 1930 and after an in-depth examination and the necessary amelioration, was approved by the Communist International. The publication of these two documents, which indicate a turning point in the life of the TKP, has made **a great contribution to the victory of the struggle against the opposition** and all kinds of deviation and the attempt to

12 For the classical critique of the Draft Pogramme presented to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, see Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1996.

> destroy the party from within.[13]

Everything is crystal clear here. The party changes its programme not because the objective situation requires it, not because of the necessity of identifying the needs of the revolution, not because it wishes to lead the working class in the right direction, but because "the unprincipled opposition has speculated on the previous action programme of the party". The literature at hand has regarded this change in the programme as a turn to the left and as a more critical stance vis-à-vis Kemalism!

A report submitted by the Opposition TKP to the Comintern also stresses the difference in the political programme between the two parties. The following passage is particularly of great importance:

> We do not regard the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry that the Comintern inserted in our programme as an illusion that can only be realized at an uncertain date. For us, this is a concrete principle. We conduct all our activities of publication and organization with the belief that this principle will be materialized in the shortest while possible. However, for the group of intellectuals, Doctor Şefik, Cevdet and Halim, this principle is an illusion.[14]

Whether the criticism levelled at the leadership of the Conformable TKP is correct or not is immaterial. As opposed to what many a historian of the Turkish left says, **the Opposition TKP claims that there is a difference of programme between the two parties**.

There are other bones of contention between Nâzım and Şefik Hüsnü. Nâzım claims that party democracy has been trampled upon for years. He also contends that the working class in Turkey is a living reality, as opposed to the leadership of the other party, who underestimate both the objective existence and the capacity for action of the proletariat. There is also a difference with respect to the importance of the Leninist conception of the party, a conception that Nâzım jealously defends.

Thus, as opposed to many sources that approach the question in terms of organisational competition, personal friction etc., we have shown, on the basis of the scarce sources that exist, that there are serious differences between the two parties in the spheres of programme, theory and method of organizing. These differences provide sufficient basis for understanding why the Comintern stood by the Conformable TKP, although the basis for its all-out attack on the Opposition TKP and on Nâzım personally in vulgar terms is rather flimsy and really requires

13 *Komintern Belgeleri*, ibid, pp. 292-93. Emphasis added.
14 Ibid, p. 158.

another explanation. Yet all this begs another question: the Opposition TKP is against the line of the Conformable TKP, which is in harmony with the political line adopted in the late 1920s by the Comintern, but it still wishes to receive the approval of the Comintern, even to become the recognized section of the International in Turkey. How to explain this?

There are several possibilites. First, the leadership of the Opposition TKP had perhaps not grasped the true meaning of the developments in the Soviet Union and the Comintern. What was happening was a first in history and very few Marxists really comprehended the process in depth. Here it might be important to remind ourselves that the late 1920s and the early 1930s were the so-called Third Period, when the Stalinist leadership of the Comintern (Molotov now having replaced Bukharin) asserted that because of the deep crisis of capitalism, a contest for power was on the order of the day. This line was to be abandoned gradually in 1934-35 for the Popular Front orientation, but this was precisely the time when Nâzım and his comrades were fighting for a more radical line for the TKP. Thus they may have been taken in by the temporarily radical discourse of the Comintern. The second possibility is that the party was a mixture of cadres who had differing opinions regarding the evolution of the Soviet Union and the Comintern. It might be that those who were more critical were unable or unwilling to take the further step of targeting the leadership of the Comintern as the real culprit. Finally, it may be that the leadership understood very well what was happening but played for time in order to educate the rank and file.

The specter of Trotsky

We have already seen that the EKKI (the Executive) attacked the Opposition TKP also for being Trotskyist. This characterization was also taken up by the Conformable TKP repeatedly.[15] This of course in no sense proves that Nâzım or the Opposition TKP was in fact Trotskyist, since the label was regularly used by Stalinists to denigrate all kinds of opposition movements.

The major type of evidence that has been used against the prospect that Nâzım might have been a Trotskyist at least for a certain period has been his several writings in which he subscribes unconditionally to the views of Stalin on a host of matters, including the Soviet Constitution and the Spanish Civil War. All these were written around 1936, when the entire initiative of the Opposition TKP had already collapsed and Nâzım was keen to return to the officially recognised party, after seven years of bitter struggle. We think that his explicit subscription to Stalin's views is not evidence that shows that he was a Stalinist, but on the

15 For instance in an article he wrote in 1933 for *Rundschau*, one of the organs of the Comintern, Şefik Hüsnü talks about the "Trotskyist opposition group of Nâzım Hikmet". Cited in: Emin Karaca, *Nâzım Hikmet Şiirinde Gizli Tarih*, Istanbul: Destek Yayınevi, 2011, p. 113.

contrary, it attests to the fact that he was, or at least he was perceived to be, an anti-Stalinist throughout those seven years. Recantation was a very common form of readmission to the Stalinist movement and this, in a certain sense, was Nâzım's recantation, his method as an intellectual of proving to the Stalinist establishment that he had finally found salvation.

There are other, more credible pieces of evidence that imply that the Opposition TKP was **not** a Trotskyist organisation. But we would also like to touch briefly upon why Nâzım may at least have been influenced by Trotsky's thinking. The first point is the admiration he held for Trotsky in his formative years. Secondly, the leaders of the Conformable TKP went at times beyond alleging, without any foundation, that the Oppositon TKP leadership was Trotskyist, to claim that they borrowed the concepts of the International Left Opposition, a movement Trotsky founded as soon as he was exiled to Turkey. Chief among these is Şefik Hüsnü's claim that leaders of the Opposition TKP resort to concepts such as "bureaucratic degeneration".[16] Thirdly, the founding congress of the Opposition TKP was held in June 1929. Trotsky himself had arrived in his Turkish exile in February 1929. The coincidence may be spurious. But there is no reason why a causal link might not exist. Trotsky was a personality who had overpowering impact on intellectuals and political leaders of Marxist persuasion. A legion of American intellectuals, called the "New York intellectuals", came under his spell in the 1930s, although he never visited New York after departing from America when revolution broke out in February 1917 in Russia.

It was, of course, much more difficult for Turkish communists to get in touch with Trotsky under the repressive conditions of the Kemalist dictatorship. However, there is one fact that is ticklish in its very existence: The childhood friend of Nâzım, Vâ-Nû, who had accompanied him to Moscow and the KUTV, but who had later drifted away from communism and withdrawn to his private life, interviewed Trotsky as a journalist.[17] One inevitably wonders whether other matters relating to the fate of the communist movement in Turkey may have crept into the conversation. It should not be forgotten that Trotsky was extremely careful in handling his hosts in exile, from Mustafa Kemal to Lázaro Cárdenas. That no trace of any relationship to Turkish communists has yet been found is no reason to think that none existed, but may be a sign of the craftiness of the commander of the Red Army in matters pertaining to security.

For the moment, these are all just possibilities. All this implies that we need deeper research. However, there is an incontrovertible verity and that is that **the Opposition TKP and Nâzım appeared as a serious threat to Stalinism**. How else would one explain the acrimonious polemic and the abusive language

16 Ibid, p. 100.

17 This he recounts in his memoirs. See Vâ-Nû, ibid, p. 307.

levelled at him and the party?

To sum up, on the basis of the evidence we have for the moment, the following conclusion seems to be standing on safe ground: the odds of Nâzım being a Trotskyist are low. But whether he is a Trotskyist or not is secondary in this context. **Nâzım is the first revolutionary Marxist of Turkey who stood up against Stalinism in power!**

The first period of captivity (1936-1951)

From the mid-1930s on Nâzım moved towards a compromise with Stalinism, the Comintern, which had by then clearly become an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, and their representative in Turkey, the Conformable TKP. We have no evidence on the reason why. However, we may advance certain hypotheses that can only be verified as research progresses.

The most probable alternative is that Nâzım gave in to the overwhelming power of the Comintern. Because of the severity of the attacks on the Opposition TKP, many cadres within the leadership of the opposition abandoned the party, especially in 1933. The Opposition TKP was a party with a heavy working class composition. We may assume that when the leading cadres of a party start to leave one by one, the factory cells will be very adversely affected by this. In short, Nâzım may have decided to come to terms with the Conformable TKP rather than falling totally outside of political activity. This is also the time when Turkish ruling circles were increasingly being brought under the influence of Nazi Germany. He may have calculated that standing together with his erstwhile opponents would be the right thing to do in the face of this mortal menace.

There may be other reasons we are not yet aware of. But we should frankly concede that at a certain stage Nâzım totally capitulated to the Comintern line. That this is a serious mistake is indubitable. But there is nothing to be shocked about. The 1930s is a period when even many a Bolshevik cadre, steeled in the school of Lenin and the revolution, after having fought in the ranks of the Left Opposition or the United Opposition, caved in to the rather primitive theory and programme of Stalinism. Trotsky was, in the end, left alone from among that generation to defend single-handedly the revolutionary internationalist heritage of Lenin. This includes people of immensely high caliber, such as Christian Rakovsky, Karl Radek, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Yevgeny Preobrazhensky, and even intellectuals and leaders who allied with Stalin in the 1920s but then were thrown into opposition in the 1930s, the most prominent name being Nikolai Bukharin. Given the capitulation of these people well-versed in the theory and practice of communism, Nâzım's retreat should come as no surprise.

To this voluntary captivity to Stalinism will be added from 1937-38 on Nâzım's persecution at the hands of the Kemalist state. Nâzım, as well as other communists, were used to being imprisoned for short periods of time and to

being tortured at the hands of the police under custody. But this time, it was different. Tried for subversion within the Navy and later within the Army, Nâzım was convicted to 28 years and remained in prison for close to 13 years. So the period between his readmission to the Conformable TKP and his last exile in 1951 was a period of double captivity, one in the prisons of Kemalism and the other, voluntary this one, in the straitjacket of Stalinism.

The internationalisation of the captivity (1951-1963)

Nâzım was released from prison in 1950, after a two-round hunger strike and a worldwide campaign of solidarity (he was now internationally renowned as a poet and his poetry had been translated into many languages). He was close to 50 years of age, but the government insisted that he should be sent for compulsory military service. This was only one of many signs that there hovered above him the threat of an assassination. Nâzım made a choice and fled to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet system and his erstwhile opponents in the TKP (there was now only one party of course) accepted him with lots of caveats. He was not given a Soviet passport until Khrushchev took the reins and thus had to receive his first passport from Poland thanks to his partially Polish lineage. He was also put under the constant watch of the main leader of the TKP and of some others. He was reintegrated into the TKP, which at that time was mainly a party in exile, with its leadership living in the Soviet Union and some Warsaw Pact countries and with puny presence within the country itself. However, this man who had been elected a member of the Central Committee at 23 years of age was not given any seats in the ruling bodies of the party as a 50-odd-year old experienced cadre until very late in the day and this despite the fact that there was a serious dearth of cadres in the party. In a sense he was under quarantine.

He was provided with a good life, including a flat in Moscow, a car, a chauffeur and a dacha in Peredelkino, where many famous literary figures had second houses as well. He was sent as a good will ambassador around the world, at first only to the countries of the "socialist bloc", but later to other countries of Asia and Africa as well and welcomed honourably in peace conferences and other such venues. In short, life in the Soviet Union was like a golden cage. This was a new form of captivity for Nâzım.

Lenin against Stalin

Nâzım was shocked by what he observed in the Soviet Union. This was a man who had last seen Moscow in the 1920s, when the city and the entire country was alive and kicking with revolutionary enthusiasm. This time around, he found a country that was stifled by years of terror and a sclerotic cultural life. He moaned and groaned for some time. It was only in 1955, two years after the death of Stalin

and a year before the famous 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that he sent his first missile, an extremely powerful one, on the bureaucracy.

This was perhaps his most damning criticism of the Soviet system. His play *Did Ivan Ivanovitch Exist or Not?* is a scathing criticism levelled at the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and all other similar countries. In order to understand the significance of this play, let us put things in historical perspective. Three years after Stalin's death, at the 20th Congress, the new leader of the party, Khrushchev, presented a report that exposed the crimes committed against communists and started a new process which was widely labeled "destalinization". One point is of crucial importance in this picture. Khrushchev and his co-thinkers characterized Stalinism as the product of "the cult of personality". In other words, deference to the leader was the mother of all ills.

We cannot do full justice to Nâzım's play Ivan Ivanovitch in the context of this article.[18] Let us only touch upon certain aspects. First, Nâzım did not wait for the party to change its official position in order to criticize the bureaucratic system, since the play was written and the text published in *Novy Mir* in 1955. Secondly, Nâzım's treatment of bureaucratization is much more radical and deep-going than the official position of the CPSU. Although Nâzım does refer to the fashionable concept of the "personality cult" elsewhere, *Ivan Ivanovitch* itself goes well beyond the limits of that concept.

The concept "personality cult" really assumes as given what it should seek to demonstrate. The real question is this: why was there a Stalin cult? Ivan Ivanovitch takes the question of bureaucratisation, personified in the case of a small town party official, as a **system**, by explaining the mechanism through which this bureaucratization is brought about not only at the level of the small town party apparatus, but at all levels. The problem is not Stalin, but **the system of social relations that makes Stalin and those of his ilk possible**. This is where the superiority of Nâzım's viewpoint lies in comparison to the theory of the "personality cult". In a very important letter that we have chosen to call "Letter to comrades", Nâzım puts forth another idea that he has not mentioned in the play since, he says, it would have sounded too didactic:

> In my opinion, bureaucratism and alongside it the personality cult are the residue of previous social orders, not only of capitalism, but of pre-capitalist social orders as well. The bureaucratism and other residues of the backward Czarist

18 We have since written a whole article devoted to this play in Turkish and criticised the denial syndrome of the Turkish left regarding this immensely brave move by Nâzım while they seem to embrace all the other things Nâzım did or wrote in his lifetime. See our "İvan İvanoviç Önemli miydi, Değil miydi?" [Was *Ivan Ivanovitch* Important or Not?"], *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 35, Summer 2018.

> Russia create an environment for the emergence of various disorders in the young socialist body.[19]

As a good Marxist, Nâzım is after a materialist explanation in response to the philosophically idealist and tautological approach that the Soviet bureaucracy has developed from within its own ranks. And why do we say tautological? Because explaining bureaucratism through the "personality cult" is like going in circles. Nâzım, on the contrary, accepts bureaucratism and the personality cult as interlinked phenomena that need a materialist explanation. The explanation provided by the bureaucracy reduces the question to an individual and calls for the abandonment of his personal methods. The members of the bureaucracy had a stake in this turnaround because everyone's life was constantly under danger. But admitting the systemic nature of the question and explaining it through the legacy of previous social orders was anathema to the bureaucracy because that would have required a full-scale shakeup of the whole system. Thus, under Khrushchev only the more salient and extreme practices were fought, while the bureaucratic system as a whole remained intact.

Nâzım leaps light years ahead of the bureaucracy in trying to provide a sysytemic and materialist critique. However, a true Marxist explanation cannot rely on residues from earlier societies, but should grasp the rule of the bureaucracy as a modern phenomenon deriving from the contradictions that the dictatorship of the proletariat engenders from its own constitution. We do not know yet whether Nâzım was aware of the most advanced Marxist analysis of the Soviet Union provided by Leon Trostky in his 1936 *The Revolution Betrayed*.

Nevertheless, Nâzım's perspective converges with that of Trotsky on a crucial question. This has to do with the most revolutionary aspect of *Ivan Ivanovitch*. In the play, Nâzım paints a fresco of Soviet society using broad strokes of the brush. Two characters in particular bear special significance. "Straw-hat", who lives in nostalgia for the *ancien regime*, and "Flatcap", who represents the working class. It is this character, Flatcap, that deals the mortal blow to Ivan Ivanovitch the bureaucrat at the end of the play! With this ending, it is as if Nâzım is putting his seal of approval on the idea, advanced by Trotsky, of political revolution by the proletariat as the only possible means of overturning the Soviet bureaucracy!

This revolutionary character of the play explains what happened when it was put on stage for the first time. When the play was staged in Moscow in 1957, on the second night mounted policemen surrounded the theatre and dispelled the spectators waiting outside the building. The play was banned. The fact that these silly bureaucratic methods were used precisely in the wake of the 20th Congress, in a period ironically dubbed that of "destalinisation", made the event look all

19 Cited by Akgül, ibid, p. 297.

the more grotesque! The desire for democratisation of the Soviet bureaucracy apparently went only as far as sending mounted police to drive away theatre-goers. However, the contradictory nature of the Soviet system allowed for the play being staged in other Soviet republics and in the countries of Eastern Europe for months or even years and winning great acclaim.

Another matter that was a great source of agony for Nâzım was the treatment meted out to Turkish communists in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s. Many Turkish communists were sent on exile to Siberia. One of these was Salih Hacıoğlu, who was among the founders of the TKP in 1920. This dedicated communist was exiled to Siberia together with his wife, who was nonetheless to remain a communist till the end of her days. Salih Hacıoğlu himself never returned from his Siberian exile.

Nâzım wrote a poem on this episode in 1956, a poem that is full of anguish and is politically extremely meaningful. Let us cite the last stanza:

> Tonight we rejoiced in Moscow
> celebrating the anniversary of the revolution:
> There wandered around the squares singing folk songs Marx
> Engels
> Lenin
> Along with the document that rehabilitated Salih…[20]

The irony will not escape the reader. That series of names usually went, at that time, as Marx, Engels, Lenin… and Stalin. By inserting the name Salih, with an obvious morphological resemblance to the name Stalin, Nâzım presents to us the reason why Stalin's name is not appropriate in that chain. That the last verse ends, in line with the grammatical forms of the agglutinative Turkish language, with a suffix at the end of the name as "Salihin" makes it even more forceful in Turkish, since Salihin rhymes perfectly with the name Stalin.

The next revolutionary Marxist move by Nâzım against Stalinism came in 1961, in the form of a poem that castigates Stalin and his system. This is such an important poem in relation to the major theme of this article that it is worth quoting in full:

> From stone, bronze, plaster, paper
> from two centimetres to seven metres
> in all the city squares we were under his boots
> of stone, bronze, plaster, paper
> and his shadow of stone, bronze, plaster, paper
> hung over our park trees

20 Our translation.

His moustache of stone, bronze, plaster, paper
was in our soups in the restaurants
In our rooms we were under his eyes
of stone, bronze, plaster, paper
Then one morning they disappeared
His boots disappeared from the squares
His shadow no longer hung over our trees
His moustache was no longer in our soup
His eyes departed from our rooms
and the pressure of thousands of tons
of stone, bronze, plaster, paper
was lifted off our chests.[21]

Many people see a contradiction between this and the eulogy that Nâzım purportedly wrote in memoriam of Stalin upon his death. We say "purportedly", since there are serious questions as to whether that requiem belongs authentically to Nâzım. Even if that is the case, it was probably commissioned and Nâzım may have found it impossible not to deliver. In any case, even the suggestion that the supposed requiem and the very real chastisement are of the same standing in representing the thinking of Nâzım seems to us an absurdity.

The 20th Congress of course made a great impact on Nâzım, as it did for communists of all persuasions around the world. For many, the effect was to push them relatively to the right. This in the following sense: this monstrous system created by Stalinism was now seen as a product of Bolshevism and created a tendency for increasing alienation not only from Stalinism, but from Leninism as well. The end result was the advocacy of a certain brand of socialism feasible, so these people opined, within the boundaries of parliamentary democracy, a road to be taken fully by the so-called "Euro-communist" current some time later. This naturally implied coming to terms with capitalism, resulting in a process of conversion to social democracy. Nâzım reacted to the situation in a manner few socialists adopted at the time: against the scourge of Stalinist bureaucratisation, he defended taking the path of Leninism once again. Two poems he wrote on the 20th Congress are crystal clear on this.

To the Twentieth Congress came Lenin,
his blue, almond eyes laughing.
He entered before the opening.
On the steps beneath the rostrum
he sat and started to take notes.

21 Nâzım Hikmet, *Beyond the Walls. Selected Poems*, translated by Ruth Christie, Richard McKane & Talât Sait Halman, London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2002, p. 234.

He did not even notice his statue.

To be under the same roof with Lenin,
to feel within our hand, with relief,
the humanity of his wise hand.

To the Twentieth Congress came Lenin.
Over the Soviet Union he was
like white clouds at dawn
the mass of fertile hopes.[22]

This is perhaps an over optimistic account of the 20th Congress, where dream has replaced mundane reality or perhaps it is a warning on the part of Nâzım, a warning regarding the necessity of turning to Lenin. If this second interpretation is not obvious for this first poem, it surely is for this second one we will quote, titled "A few words for communists".

I have a couple of words for you, communists:
whether you are at the head of the state or in a dungeon,
whether you are a foot soldier or party secretary,
Lenin should be able to enter at all times and in all spaces
your work, your home, your entire life
as if it were his own work, his own home, his own life.[23]

It is evident that here it is not a matter of optimism, but a stark principle that Nâzım posits as necessary to comply with. Nâzım has gone back to his 19 years. He was an apprentice of Lenin during his education in communism. He is now inviting everyone back to Lenin. The captive Bolshevik is revealing his inner self, becoming the real Nâzım.

This orientation expressed in poetic aesthetics let us now read in Marxist intellectual terms from Nâzım's pen. Again from the "Letter to Comrades" that we have already had occasion to quote:

> Until the complete victory of communism over the entire world, in other words, until there remains no money, no state, nor armed forces, nor parties, there is always the threat of the emergence of the personality cult, small or big. The only weapon for struggling against this is the correct grasp of Lenin's principles and their materialisation in all the spheres of political and social life, in all socialist countries.[24]

22 Our translation.
23 Our translation.
24 Akgül, ibid, p. 298.

Here we see that Nâzım's conception of communism relies on the world revolution and the complete victory of communism on the world scale, just as it was in the classical period of Bolshevism. The year is 1956. Nâzım has defended the views of Stalinism at the tactical level, or even at the theoretical level at times. He has advocated the very right-wing views of the TKP on the radio time he was given on the station of the TKP. But all this is a product of captivity. First, captivity to the TKP buttressed by the EKKI, the Executive of the Comintern, and later, captivity to the Soviet bureaucracy. But as soon as Nâzım turns to the world-historic problems that socialism is suffering from, as soon as he proceeds to explain bureaucratic degeneration, he says that these problems can be irreversibly solved under the "complete victory of communism at the world scale". Here you have the revolutionary Marxist conception of socialism in a nutshell!

This internationalism has so infused Nâzım's thinking that in a diametrically opposite manner to the conception of national communism emanating from the bureaucracy, he characterises the Soviet state, that is a single state on its own, as "the international state Lenin created".[25] Look how he is dreaming of the future:

> The child on whose face reflects
> The shimmering light of the Christmas tree,
> Obviously, don't know why, but obviously
> Will live twice as long as I will.
> Will go out to the cosmos and return, but that's not it.
> Will see the mother of miracles on earth:
> A single human nation shining forth.
> I am optimistic, friends, like a stream…[26]

Havana: revolution again!

There are certain verses written by Nâzım that almost every educated Turk knows by heart, whether they approve of him or not. Or rather these have become expressions in the Turkish language with a heavy load of connotations. Perhaps the most famous of these are those quoted at the beginning of this article, verses that address a very close painter friend of Nâzım's, Abidin Dino, who himself was a great communist artist in his own right:

> can you paint happiness Abidin
> but without taking the easy way out
> not the angel-faced mother nursing her rosy-cheeked baby
> nor the apples on white cloth
> nor the goldfish darting among aquarium bubbles

25 This is from the memoirs of his last wife Vera Tulyakova. Cited in Akgül, ibid, p. 231.
26 Our translation.

can you paint happiness Abidin
can you paint Cuba in midsummer 1961

Most people, though, are not aware what occasion prompted Nâzım to ask Abidin Dino this question. Yet this was another turning point in Nâzım's eventful life. When he visited Havana in the summer of 1961, the poet was going through a period of quasi-depression in his life. The petrified world of the Soviet Union (what Che called the "pigsty"), the stagnation in his own life, his position of "a tree that cannot receive water from its root", in other words his separation from his own people, all had a part to play. For ten years now, outside of the excitement of international meetings, he has been breathing this suffocating monotonous atmosphere. Because he is a born optimist, a lively and inquisitive soul, it cannot really be said that he is totally broken down. But he is at the ebb of his politicisation. His faith in revolution and communism is untouched, but this is a dream that has been postponed indefinitely, so to speak.

Havana fills Nâzım with revolutionary zeal once again.

in the space that is Cuba six million people whites blacks yellows mulattoes are planting a bright seed the seed of seeds joyously

This is a single verse! Havana has opened up a new revolution in Nâzım's poetry as well. What enthusiasm, what dazzlement! The poet asks Abidin another question:

master can you paint *Praise be praise be I saw the day I could die now and not be sorry*
can you paint *What a pity what a pity I could have been born in Havana this morning*

Several testimonies, among them that of his last wife (Russian) and that of a very close friend, a confidant, journalist Zekeriya Sertel, offer us a clear picture. Nâzım is now feeling remorse for having fled to the Soviet Union. Instead, he thinks, he should have remained in Turkey and taken up arms to fight a guerrilla war just like Fidel and Che.[27]

After having become spellbound on the Plaza de la Revolución, Nâzım also writes the following verse in the same poem:

My nineteenth year crosses Beyazit Square comes out on Red Square and goes down to Concorde I meet Abidin and we talk squares[28]

27 Sertel, a.g.y., p. 93-94. Cited from Tulyakova by Akgül, a.g.y., p. 310-312.
28 All translations from the poem "Straw-Blond" in *Poems of Nâzım Hikmet*, Translated from the Turkish by Randy Blasing & Mutlu Konuk, New York: Persea Books, 2002, p. 253.

Lost in the upheaval of revolutionary zeal at 59, he goes back to his unforgettable 19th year, when he was an apprentice near Lenin and Trotsky.

The year is 1961. Only ten years left to the taking up of arms of the 1971 generation in Turkey, a new generation of Marxists, Mahir Çayan, Deniz Gezmiş, Sinan Cemgil and İbrahim Kaypakkaya, as well as many other heroic figures, who adopted a different road from the sclerotic TKP. We do not find their strategy correct, but their revolutionary zeal is entirely different from the petrified TKP. Only ten years separate the revolutionary ardour that Nâzım felt in Havana in 1961 and the rise of the generation of 1971. The tradition is almost touching the future, but not quite.

Nâzım on the Plaza de la Revolución in the summer of 1961. The Cuban revolution, which has started as a democratic revolution, whose only Marxists within the leadership are Che and Raúl, whose *jefe máximo*, Fidel, is not a Marxist yet, has to turn socialist in order to survive, has to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat or lose the battle, has to become permanent revolution! Nâzım is there to witness the declaration that Cuba is henceforth a socialist country. The second process of permanent revolution he is experiencing, the first at 19, the second at 59. Revolution again!

Conclusion

Let us now summarise what we have been able to bring to light in this article and what still remains in the dark. What we have been able to uncover is clear: Nâzım, that giant of a man, did not fit into the Procrustean bed of the Stalinist EKKI, the Executive of the Comintern, and had to be expelled from the International, no longer the revolutionary world party that Lenin had established but an instrument of the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy. An event this important cannot simply be dismissed by saying, "well, we know that Nâzım was not a Trotskyist". This would be dismissing the real course of the history of the communist movement in Turkey. It is true that one of the things that still remain in the dark is whether or to what extent Nâzım had been influenced by Trotsky. But **this is not the sole question**. Anyone who takes the history of communism in Turkey should enquire **the preliminary question** of why Nâzım and his party comrades came into conflict with the Comintern and its preferred section in Turkey. Only a handful of historians and Marxist intellectuals have looked into this question and not in a satisfactory manner.

From the limited evidence supplied by the documents and testimonies so far unearthed we reached the conclusion above that Nâzım and his party were at loggerheads with the Comintern on at least four crucial questions: **political programme, the Leninist organisational methods of work, inner party democracy, and confidence in the working class of Turkey as a political**

actor. The first three are among the bones of contention between the Comintern now brought under the straitjacket of Stalinism and revolutionary Marxism, the successor to the Bolshevik traditions of the October revolution. Hence, according to the evidence extant, **Nâzım and his comrades stood up against the Comintern line (though not the Comintern itself *per se*) on revolutionary Marxist bases**.

Secondly, Nâzım returned to the Comintern and thus capitulated before Stalinism after 1936. In what sense is still waiting to be researched. What we have contended in this article is that despite caving in to the dominant trend, Nâzım never abandoned the Bolshevik theoretical kernel in his grasp of Marxism and communism.

Thirdly what was a temporary hypothesis, i.e. that Nâzım never departed from the Bolshevik kernel, was corroborated by the events of his time of exile in the 1950s and early 1960s in the Soviet Union. Nâzım was critical vis-à-vis the new Soviet society brought under the stranglehold of bureaucratic rule from the very beginning and, from 1955 on, that is to say from the point at which he wrote *Ivan Ivanovitch*, he adopted **an explicit and straightforward anti-Stalinist position**.

Even more important perhaps, he did not go with the crowd of the "personality cult" and move right towards what was later to become Euro-communism, throwing the Leninist baby out together with the Stalinist bathwater, but pursued, from day one, a revolutionary line that was **based on Leninist principles and confidence in the working class**. One should never forget that it was the stick in the hands of "Flatcap" that sent Ivan Ivanovitch the bureaucrat tumbling down.

This is the plain picture. It is on this basis that we propose the image of the "captive Bolshevik" in order to describe Nâzım, rather than that of the "romantic communist" that a popular recent biography has spread. This latter image implies that Nâzım was strongly attached to the "ideals" of Marxism, which look quite impeccable in theory. However, the practice of the doctrine left Nâzım disillusioned. And yet, he remained faithful to his "ideals" romantically, even as he was bitterly aware that these "ideals" would never materialize. This is the "romantic communist". Our image of the "captive Bolshevik", on the other hand, implies that Nâzım was confident that the problems engendered by the practical development of Marxism could be comprehended by Marxism itself and resolved if one remains true to Marxist (and even Leninist!) principles in practice. The picture depicted in this article surely confirms this latter explanation.

It would be in order to explain briefly this concept of "captive". At whose hands was Nâzım captive? Several forces. For one, at a certain stage, he was literally the prisoner of Kemalism. Having been convicted overall to 28 years, he spent close to half of this time in its prisons. In an entirely different sense, Nâzım fell captive to the Comintern. From 1936 on, Nâzım came to an agreement with his erstwhile opponents in the communist movement and willingly accepted its

straitjacket of "socialism in one country" and all that flowed therefrom. Some may act rashly and conclude that the picture we draw is flawed by this period of willing captivity. They had better think twice and remember that powerful Marxist intellectuals and leaders of the Bolshevik Party itself capitulated before Stalinism in the same period, which does not imply that they were not captive in the hands of the bureaucracy. Witness the very material dénouement of the whole episode in the Moscow Trials!

The third captivity is that of the captivity to the country that hosted him in exile, the Soviet Union. Here he confronted two different methods: close supervision and the golden cage of the easy life of the celebrity. It was only after his experience in Havana in 1961 that Nâzım fully consciously grasps the condition he has lived in for the last decade of his life. Despite this captivity, though, he is sufficiently bold and independent-minded to come out, as a captive exile, with thunderous criticism against the bureaucratic system where many Soviet citizens of much more protected civil status and cultural stature kept silent.

This complex picture leaves us with two important reminders. The question of method in looking at history is crucial. Whoever neglects the dialectical method, ignores the contradictory nature of things and the mediations that create a distance between different facets of the same phenomenon will pay the price by ending up with a reductionist picture of history. Secondly, there is immense work to be done for the younger generation of Marxists in order to unearth the truth about the early history of Turkish communism and in particular the episode of the Opposition TKP.

This brings us to our most important conclusion. As early as the 1920s, a sizeable minority in almost every communist party affiliated to the Comintern came up against the criminal drift that Stalinism imposed on the world communist movement. Many of these joined the International Left Opposition formed by Trotsky and ended up establishing the Fourth International in 1938. Turkey seemed to be an exception. There was no Trotskyist opposition within Turkish communism in the 1920s and 1930s, it was said. The birth of Turkish Trotskyism had to wait for the 1960s and the 1970s. Well, yes, there was an Opposition TKP. Yes, the leaders of this party had been treated as outcasts by the Comintern under Stalinism, much as the Trotskyists had. But this was a road accident, a glitch so to speak. Everything was solved amicably. Even Nâzım returned to his party and the Comintern. All is well that ends well.

He did return, but as a bomb ready to explode! And this bomb went off in 1955. To divide history into unrelated slices divorced from each other, to eradicate the links between phenomena, to avoid taking the flow of things as a process whose parts make up the whole, this is not the method of Marxism or that of the dialectic. One ought to call a spade a spade: in the second half of the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, **a revolt occurred within Turkish communism**

against the Stalinist stranglehold being established over the Comintern. And at the head of this revolt was the greatest poet of Turkey ever, Nâzım Hikmet. No wonder he says, in his poem "Autobiography", "nor was I crushed beneath the fallen idols".

The first revolutionary Marxist movement countering the bureaucracy, then, emerged in Turkey in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. That movement was defeated. But today's revolutionary Marxist movement will do all that is possible to win. And it will also dip into the movement of yesteryear to draw lessons, so that it can struggle all the better.