

Issue 50, our very special issue

Revolutionary Marxism Editorial Board

Our issue No. 50 is a milestone in the 16-year journey of the journal. To learn about its birth story, let's see the first paragraphs of the piece written by the Editorial Board to mark the 10th anniversary of *Devrimci Marksizm*:

Devrimci Marksizm is 10 years old now. It met the masses on May Day in 2006. As a journal of militant theory it first saw the light of day on the streets, so to speak. Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is its core tenet: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it". The consciousness that Marxism is a guide for the working class and all other social classes and strata to annihilate capitalism has always been its leading principle.

The journal of *Devrimci Marksizm* embarked upon its journey with a small Editorial Board, alongside an advisory board which has later loosened and become unfunctional. That small Board, which has shouldered the Journal perseverantly for so long, later expanded and became institutionalized. We are now about to take a second leap forward. The journal is once again wrapped in a large discussion and advisory network. Fresh blood pumped into its veins reinvigorates the Journal. We believe that it will draw even more intellectuals, especially young ones, into its ranks.¹

That expectation has been realized since then, with the Editorial Board doubling its capacity by including new comrades of younger generations. Our expansion,

¹ Editorial Board, "Devrimci Marksizm'in 10 Yılı—devrimci Marksist teorinin 30 yılı", *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 28-29, Fall-Winter 2016, p. 14-15.

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however, has gone far beyond that. We formed a committee called *Devrimci Marksizm* Collective through which we collaborate with our friends of various generations in the planning and evaluation of the Journal. It means that our editorial capacity has quadrupled since 2016, and thus having more authors writing articles regularly for the Journal. Theoretical contributions made by young comrades among those writers are also something needed to be stressed. Then we would say that *Devrimci Marksizm* had a successful journey so far. If a journal publishes 50 issues in 16 years without any serious setbacks and expands its editorial staff to such an extent, it is something to be proud of.

The Anatomy of issue No. 50

Our issue No. 50 is set out to clarify in what respects our approach, method and basic theses diverge from those embraced by the other tendencies in the left. In other words, it responds to the following questions: Why do we try to understand and explain the world and contemporary thoughts, using the Marxist method? Why Marxism instead of the trendy currents on the left? Hence our new issue marks the methodological and political boundaries between the journal *Devrimci Marksizm* and the other left tendencies as well as establishing the superiority of Marxism over them.

Such efforts have undoubtedly been expended in the 19th and 20th centuries. Marx and Engels devoted the third section of the *Communist Manifesto* to criticizing the non-communist socialist movements. Engels' classical work on the comparison between utopian socialism and scientific socialism is of the same kind. Lenin's *What is to be Done?* and other works were to highlight the differences between his perspective and non-Bolshevik socialist and revolutionary currents, including once-a-chief-ally Kautsky's revisionist Marxism (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*). Trotsky had to fight not only against social democracy and Stalinism, but also against anarchism in Russia and Spain, and the various shades of centrism in the struggle for the re-construction of Marxist movement.

That effort is indeed a must in any era for any current of thought. It is however much more important for a current such as Marxism, which defines theory and practice as prerequisite of each other, and is predicated on their dialectical unity, because some theories lead humanity to emancipation whilst some knock on the gates of hell!

That is an indispensable duty because, at least in the last 40 years, new currents of thought, from postmodernism and left liberalism to post-Marxism, post-Fordism and post-colonialism, which belong to the tradition of those knocking on the gates of hell, declared Marxism as the arch-enemy. Accordingly they have mobilized their all forces to undermine its long-lasting and worldwide hegemony and reputation, extending from the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* to anti-colonial struggles after the October Revolution.

While class struggle and imperialism are ignored as old-fashioned concepts, revolution is stigmatized as a form of "social engineering" disrupting the natural course of history. To seek solutions for the oppressed and exploited masses who

are condemned to poverty and misery is underestimated by the discourse of “poor-mouthing”. Many have joined that anti-Marxist crusade; postmodernists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Spivak, Butler, Rorty, Hardt or once-Marxist intellectuals like Antonio Negri, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Stuart Hall, Stanley Aronowitz etc. Innumerable Turkish Marxist theoreticians and political leaders and parties, including those aligned with the Kurdish liberation movement, have also embraced an ideological-political direction, which is a hybrid of postmodernism and left liberalism.

This new conjuncture of the last 40-50 years was brought about in parallel with and in relation to the 20th socialist construction attempts and their respective crisis culminating in collapse. And it puts new and demanding tasks before the late 20th and early 21st century Marxists.

Genealogy of Devrimci Marksizm

Because Turkey has been convulsed by gigantic class struggles and social turmoils between 1960 and 1980, the conjuncture, a world-historical development, aforementioned above was yet to manifest itself locally. Its introduction into the country, in the form of “left liberalism”, became possible only after the military coup of 12th September 1980 and onward, during which revolutionary, socialist and communist movements have been persecuted under the military yoke.

Turkish left and Marxist intellectuals have a dignified place in the ranks of the international Marxism for being among those who had defined characteristics of the infiltration accurately and counter-attacked it early. In its first issue published in 1985, the journal of *11. Tez* (Eleventh Thesis), after addressing the striking transformation in the international leftist intellectual milieu, depicted its reflections on the Turkish left in the introductory piece titled “As We Begin” as follows:

...The post-coup period witnessed a crisis in the Turkish left in which a left-liberal and individualist approach was born and then became widespread. It has, intentionally or unintentionally, been aligned with an anti-historical-materialism line by denying the revolutionary achievements of the past thoroughly on the pretext of criticizing the old wrongdoings. That approach substitutes the class-based contradictions and relations with the liberal dichotomy of state and civil society. Democratization is conflated with “the constitution of civil society”, and thus equating democracy to “market economy” or capitalism. Classes and socialism are, in short, conspicuous by their absence in that perspective.²

It was the first time that “left liberalism” was conceptualized in Turkey and, as far as we know, in the World as well. Lagging behind Turkey with respect to agility and preparedness against this new orientation caused left liberalism not to be defined and then classified on a solid basis for long. French left, for example, had named it “second left” for decades. Latin American Marxists still call such tendencies “democracy-prone left”.

² “Başlarken”, *11. Tez*, No: 1, November 1985, p. 6-7.

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II. Tez had gathered Marxists affiliated with various political movements and tendencies alongside independent academics. As the bastion of Marxism in Turkey, it has played a crucial role during a specific period. Notwithstanding its merits, even such a journal could not escape the internationally deleterious effects of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Many members of the Editorial Board were stricken profoundly by that event. The journal eventually had to terminate its publication.

The Revolutionary Marxists, who had assumed a leading position in founding the *II. Tez*, have maintained their fight first in the *Sınıf Bilinci* (1988-1999) and then in *Devrimci Marksizm* (since 2006) against left liberalism and similar tendencies. What we say is not that none of the other Marxist currents have challenged them. We would rather say that the two journals have carried on the fight based on the perspective outlined in the “As We Begin” of the *II. Tez*. The perspective was to be recapitulated in the first issue of the *Devrimci Marksizm*:

Notwithstanding being built on different theoretical and philosophical premises, left liberalism, post-Marxism, postmodernism, post-Fordism, globalism and etc. have two common characteristics. Firstly, they are the quasi-left version of Fukuyama’s theory declaring the end of history after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their perspective is confined to the bourgeois liberal international order claimed to be the least evil among the alternatives. That the countries like Turkey integrate into that global order, for example, via the EU membership, is peddled to be a great achievement and harbinger of democracy. Secondly, those theories are predicated on the rejection of the conflicts and struggles stemming from society’s being divided based on class.³

Our issue No. 50 is a synthesis of the struggle against those tendencies: The first dossier scrutinizes postmodernism, post-Marxism and Murray Bookchin, whose theoretical approach is a liberal and postmodernist form of anarchism. Some articles, for example, about the postcolonial theory, and the influence of the non-material labor on the labor theory of value, which are planned for this issue but yet to be completed, will be published in our next issue.

Not all fashionable theories are addressed in the issue. The most important one among those is, of course, left-liberalism, which it is fair to say that it is the most influential variant in Turkey. The absence of such an account is that both the *Sınıf Bilinci* and the *Devrimci Marksizm* have dealt comprehensively with it before.

The fate of anti-Marxist tendencies in the face of practice

In this piece we do not intend to discuss the fashionable theories. They are already addressed in separate articles in this issue, and will be in the next issue. We would like to touch briefly on a relevant issue, though. The measure of accuracy for any theory is practice. It is clear that theories proven wrong by concrete realities and facts can not extend beyond being fantasies. Then the question is; have those fashionable theories passed the test successfully?

³ Editorial Board, “Başlarken”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 1, May 2006, p. 8-9.

Since we took up the question comprehensively in our previous issues, there is no need to deliver a full balance-sheet, but our answer is unequivocal: Political projections of anti-Marxist tendencies have ended up in a fiasco worldwide.

The financial catastrophe of 2008 exposed the feebleness of the left liberal and postmodernist fetishism of globalization (“global village”!): Trump’s fascistic nationalist policies which have later been carried on by Biden hammered the last nail in the coffin of the fantasy of “globalization” alongside crumbling the ludicrous vanity of the assertion that “the nation-state is dead”. Even classical fascism (of course in new forms) is back from the grave, as the most dangerous outcome of the contradiction between the nation-states and capitalist integration of the world.

“Imperialism is replaced by interdependency” was another fancy premise articulated by those who have turned a blind eye to massive poverty, misery and imperialist wars. It faded into oblivion as did “globalization”.

It has also been preached that capitalist states have learned how to contain economic crisis. When a great depression began after the financial collapse in 2008, that argument was falsified instantly and swiftly. As a new world war appears to be a tangible threat on the grounds that NATO and the USA have launched an attack on Russia and China, the myth “in a fully-integrated globe, a new world war is impossible” is being shattered.

The next to be debunked will be the motto “class is dead, long live identity”, no doubt! This myth will for sure be wiped out by proletarian revolutions, which is the only solution to the contradictions capitalism has dragged mankind into. Popular uprising waves spanning from 2011 to nowadays, covering a large geography from the Middle East to Asia and South America, are so important that they can be considered to be the harbinger of those revolutions.

Stalinism and Maoism to be addressed in our next issue

We have so far dealt with the intellectual tendencies to have launched a grand mobilization against Marxism in the last 40-50 years. We stated that the main aim of that issue is to introduce those tendencies to our readers; to criticize them; and thus showing why we still insist on Marxism. Our next issue, however, will give a place to the critiques of two tendencies which call themselves Marxist. Why? What is the irony here?

The reason behind why we address those tendencies in a separate dossier in the next issue is that they had played a vital role in the collapse of the socialist construction attempts of the 20th century. Postmodernism, left liberalism and others have infiltrated into the international left through the fissures on the Berlin Wall. The historical rupture by those tendencies from the core principles of Marxism had decisive effects which caused both the collapse of the Wall and the people to desperately revolt at the T’ien-an Men.

That story can be told in a different way, too. If Stalinism and Maoism (and its Albanian version, that is, Enver Hoxha) are really what Marxism argues for, the degeneration of the 20th socialisms and their collapse en masse are then logical consequences of Marxism. That the international left refrained from reckoning

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with that question and its root causes, namely, the programme of “socialism in one country” and the break with internationalism, paved the way for postmodernism, left liberalism and others to infiltrate into the ranks of the left, and for their ideas to be disseminated easily among young intellectuals.

Taking a critical stance against Stalinism and Maoism also reveals why the Journal is not simply titled as *Marxism*, but is as *Revolutionary Marxism*. Not all tendencies wearing the badge ‘Marxist’ are able to solve the problems humanity has been facing. Only can a revolutionary Marxism, which remains allegiant to the authentic or undistorted-by-bureaucracy form of the programme of the world revolution, offer a true remedy to our wounds. Some ask why do you call yourself a “revolutionary Marxist”? It is so by nature, isn’t it? We are not the ones to coin the term. The term “Revolutionary Marxism” is used frequently by Lenin in his works. He employed it to distinguish the authentic and veritable Marxism from those degenerated by reformism, opportunism, nationalism; namely, against Bernstein, Kautsky, Mensheviks and social democrats. We use it also against Stalinism and Maoism, both of which sold out the cause of the world revolution by reconciling with the world bourgeois.

A militant theory

As a closing remark, let us underline a point we have ever emphasized. That is a journal of “theory *and* politics”, meaning that its theoretical efforts are inextricably intertwined with the target of changing the world. The journal *Devrimci Marksizm* is an outcome created by a cadre of people who use theory and science not for the sake of pedantic and academic pretensions, but as a guide to advance the revolutionary cause. It therefore represents the tradition of militant theory. That is why it features Lenin’s following succinct phrase on the first page of each issue: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”.

The paragraph below, extracted from a piece written collectively by the Editorial Board which argued that the world had entered into a new Great Depression in 2008, and which has since been, so to speak, our journal’s manifesto, is the best expression of our goal:

Devrimci Marksizm presented its main objective in its first issue as follows: “Our journal is aimed at fighting an ideological war against the pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist luminaries who, in the pages of newspapers such as *The Economist*, mention an ‘intellectual war’ that the international bourgeois has to win. We, as the journal *Devrimci Marksizm*, declare that we join that war for the victory of the working class”.⁴

4 Editorial Board, “Yeni Bir Dönem Açılıyor: Mali Çöküş, Depresyon, Sınıf Mücadelesi”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 8, p. 12.

The age of egoism

Sungur Savran

Introduction: Fifty years of solitude¹

In the last half-century the intellectual universe of the international left has undergone a tremendous process of change. In place of the progressively increasing domination of Marxism over the left and even over intellectual life in general for longer than a period of 120 years, that is to say from 1848 to 1968, if we take the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* as our point of departure, postmodernism has now taken front stage, with its peculiar idiom, its muddle of disjointed ideas, its unmistakable type of narrative, and its idiosyncratic style in the arts, literature, film, and architecture.

The intellectual life of the left-wing movement in each country was subjected to the assault of postmodernism at a different moment and through a different trajectory. France experienced this wave in the wake of 1968. The general public in other European countries and the United States had to wait for the 1980s to get a taste of the new *lingua franca* of the universe of left-wing thinking. As for countries subordinated to imperialism, including our own country Turkey, these were first intro-

¹ This article was originally written in Turkish for Special Issue No. 50 of our Turkish-language journal, *Devrimci Marksizm*, focusing on the confrontation between Marxism and postmodernism. It has been translated into English by the author himself. Apart from the omission of details that would be of no interest to an international audience, only stylistic changes have been made to the text. As for footnotes we omitted many of them, especially those that made side remarks and those that referred to Turkish-language sources, for an economy of time. We would like to thank at the outset the members of the Editorial Board of *Revolutionary Marxism* for having made very useful comments on a first draft of this article. Thanks to them we have, we believe, ameliorated some of the sections of this article considerably.

duced to left-wing liberalism in the 1980s, postmodernism following suit a bit later.

The impact was earth-shaking. In every country where postmodernism made its appearance, Marxism may be said to have survived at a dose that may befit an aperitif taken at a cocktail party and even that was a quasi-Marxism that proudly wore the insignia of anti-Leninism as a trade mark. But *revolutionary* Marxism became utterly marginal in the world of the intelligentsia. Marxism has been wading across the intellectual world in profound solitude for decades now. In Turkey this was felt for the first time after the military coup of 1980. However, as we and the socialists/communists of other countries were still talking in the idiom of Marxism that befitted the furious class struggles of the 1970s, the jargon of postmodernism had already taken over in France and, somewhat later, elsewhere. That is why the solitude adds up to half a century.

The purpose of this article is not to provide a theoretical/philosophical critique of postmodernism and schools of thought that are, in one way or another, affiliated to it, such as left-wing liberalism, post-Marxism, post-Fordism, globalism and others. Our aim here is to try to understand how it came about that postmodernism and company have replaced Marxism as the dominant mode of thinking in the world of the left intelligentsia. Nothing that goes on in the world of ideas is the product exclusively of that world itself. Each current of thought, literature or art, each theory, each philosophical school is a response to practical developments in the material world. Not only a response, in fact, but also a product of those developments grasped through the ideological filter of certain classes, strata, groups, political currents etc. When one is discussing postmodernism and currents affiliated to it, it would be folly to attribute their domination over the intellectual life of the left to the genius of the main representatives of this thinking (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Richard Rorty, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray among many others). Some of these, for instance Foucault, Deleuze, Negri or Laclau, may be considered to be truly profound thinkers even if entirely misguided in their outlook. Some, on the contrary, are straightforward *charlatans*. It would be undeserved praise for people like Baudrillard or Lyotard or their lesser co-thinkers in other countries and unjustified disdain for the intelligence of humanity at large to contend that these thinkers are the real *moving force* behind the intellectual spasms, convulsions and pangs experienced by the international intelligentsia within the last half-century. They should only be treated as *symptoms*. The real historical factors that have thrown even these charlatans to the front stage should be sought in the practical developments in the material world.²

² Our characterisation of some postmodernists as “charlatans”, a term that has become specialised in the history of science and ideas precisely for people who deliberately try to benefit from muddling issues for the purpose of gaining an audience and becoming famous, may disturb some of our friends who have been to a certain extent influenced by postmodernism. We would like to mention a small episode in this context. Louis Althusser, who was an admirer of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan for decades, attacked him and called him a “magnificent clown” late in his life. See Taner Timur, *Marksizm, İnsan ve Toplum. Balibar, Sève, Althusser, Bourdieu*, İstanbul: Yordam, 2015, s. 162.

What we will be looking into in this article are the socio-economic and political developments that lie behind this enormous landslide. While trying to explain the background of the tremor that has shaken the world of the left intelligentsia, we will have to answer many different questions. It would be useful to mention some of these at the outset lest we lose our path when confronted with such a labyrinthine question.

In the course of discussing the phenomenon of postmodernism, the present article will attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What do the spokespeople for postmodernism and affiliated schools of thinking say and represent, not from the point of view of philosophical arguments, but that of their concrete approach to the problems of the world we live in? (2) What routes have the spreading and popularisation of these ideas taken and what stages did these processes go through? (3) Why is it that this development occurred in the aftermath of 1968, seemingly a period of momentous revolutionary ascendancy? (4) Why did these ideas not remain peculiar to that specific period but, on the contrary, characterised an entire historical period, a whole half-century so far? (5) What kind of political developments accompanied this tremor in the sphere of ideas? At the opposite end of the effects of political life on ideological trends, how did this radical turn in ideology affect political life itself?

Finally, we would like to underline at the outset with utmost care the following point: most of our readers are aware that postmodern thought stands in a one-to-one relationship with so-called identity politics. Behind currents such as multiculturalism, feminism, LGBTQI+ stand postmodernist and similar thinking and the former receive their intellectual nourishment from the latter. The critique we will level at identity politics below *by no means* implies a refusal to admit the crucial nature of the social and political questions that form the material background to these (the oppression of nations and religious minorities, the manifold forms of inequality and humiliation created in the imperialist epoch, in particular by colonialism, forms that still haunt even what today are formally independent entities, the oppression of women, the multiplicity of forms in which those whose sexual orientation departs from heterosexual norms etc.). The revolutionary Marxist tradition that we come from has in general been careful when dealing with such oppression, albeit not always equally consistent on every question. The world has not had to wait for postmodernism in order to wage a fight around at least some of these questions (the most important instances being the struggle for the self-determination of nations and the emancipation of women). Our difference regarding these forms of oppression and the struggle to eliminate them lies only in the method to be used.

1. Postmodernism: the opium of the intellectuals

Raymond Aron, perhaps the doyen of bourgeois liberal thinking in France's intellectual life of the 20th century, published a much-discussed book in 1955 on the influence of Marxism on the French intelligentsia, titled *L'opium des intellectuels*, "the opium of the intellectuals". A title no doubt conceived intelligently, turning Marx's famous dictum "religion is the opium of the people" against Marxism itself. Yet it has now become clear, though Aron did not live to see it, that the opium of the