

The Armenian Genocide as Class Struggle¹

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*Lights have come on at Karabet's grocer
This Armenian citizen did not forgive
The slaying of his father on Kurdish mountains
But he loves you, for neither have you forgiven
Those who have stained the Turk's brow with that blood.*

Nâzım Hikmet (1951)

*In the person of the leader of the Baku Commune, the Bolshevik **Stepan Shaumian**, the “Caucasian Lenin”, as he has been called, and, we would add, the Mustafa Suphi of Armenia, to the cherished memory of the hundreds of thousands, nay millions, of our akhbarighs and kuirighs (brothers and sisters) who lost their lives as a result of the savagery of the policies of the reactionaries and the imperialists of Turkey, Kurdistan, Russia, Germany, Britain and others...*

¹ This is the translation into English of the author's article published in Turkish in 2015, on the occasion of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide, in *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 23, Spring 2015. The translation is by the author himself. The article being published here is almost the same as the Turkish version in all essentials. There was just a bit of shortening in certain parts which would be of less interest to an international audience than a Turkish one. The best example is Section 11 below titled “The National Question in Anatolia”, where there was some shortening of the text because that section treats a question that is dear to the heart of Turkish and Kurdish audiences, but would have been, in its original form, a bit too long-winded for foreign audiences. In addition, some footnotes throughout the article that provide excursions outside the main argument or refer to sources that are of no interest to a foreign audience were omitted. Nothing essential has been changed. The argument stands in exactly the same shape as the original. Here and there we have made changes so as to avoid crying examples of anachronism (cf. the first sentence of the main body of the article).

*And to the memory of the bitterly missed **Hrant (Dink)**, “the last Armenian” as we called him when he was assassinated, almost a century later, on 19 January 2007.*

110 years have gone by since one and a half million Armenians, men and women, elderly and infants, were deported in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, what is now the territory of the Republic of Turkey, from provinces as distant from each other as Bursa and Diyarbakir and Trabzon and Adana, of which a great majority were massacred systematically on the road. Unimaginable sexual violence was practised against women. The survivors were either forced to emigrate to other climes or were forcibly Islamised. It is impossible not to suffer unendurable heart pangs when talking about such atrocities. Especially for those of us who grew up in the Istanbul of the 1950s and the 1960s, among Armenian, Greek, and Jewish families, the physical and spiritual reality of such a mass-scale massacre is all the more heart-rending, despite the anachronism of the event and our lifetime. They were *akhbarighs* and *kuirighs* for us. That is how we were brought up.

If the remainder of this article provides a cold-blooded analysis from within the universe of historical materialism, this is not because it is the only disposition we nourish toward the events of 1915. That year evokes in us, first and foremost, rage, horror, revolt. It calls forth the desire of embracing the dead body of one’s sister or brother and sob one’s heart out. But if we wish to prevent the recurrence of this squalor, this atrocity, this savagery, then we simply cannot make do with lamentation. Understanding is as important as grieving. To understand so as not to allow it to happen again! Not against the Armenian, nor the Kurd. To prevent the mini-rehearsal that the Roboskî massacre stands for.² To forestall a repetition of the Anfal.³ To forbid the export to other climes of what has been done in early 21st century in Sri Lanka to the Tamil people.

To be able to achieve this, that is, to put an end to acts of genocide not only in Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Caucasus, but the world round, we need to understand what the drivers of acts of genocide are. Social Darwinism, racism, chauvinism, the “CUP mentality”⁴ or whatever you may care to add to this list, it is our contention that factors that derive from “the universe of mentality”, “the imaginary”, as it has been fashionable during the recent decades to call such factors, are inadequate to explain genocide. Important as it may be to understand the ideological phantasms that inhabit people’s minds, these invite a question that needs to be answered: why is it that these phantasms inundate the minds of millions at precisely that moment in history? We submit that the answer lies in class struggles and, hence, that only the conceptual framework of Marxism, the historical materialist method can shed light on the processes of genocide. Only thus can we understand them. Yet that is not all.

2 The killing in December 2011 by air bombardment by the Turkish Armed Forces of 34 young Kurds, half of them minors, as they were crossing the border between Turkey and Iraq for the purpose of petty trade as frontier residing Kurds do routinely.

3 The massacre of thousands of Kurdish civilians by Saddam Hussein of Iraq through the use of chemical weapons in 1989, towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

4 The CUP was the leading party of the first bourgeois revolution in Ottoman Turkey in 1908.

Once we understand, we need to evict this prime mover from the face of the earth. This article will try to contribute to this effort by looking at the pinnacle of genocide in our region and territory, i.e. the Armenian genocide.

Introduction

The unprecedented decline of the influence of Marxism within the intellectual life of humanity at large during the last half century, its crowding out of the field by postmodernism and its self-styled identity politics, results in the perception of national questions in a superficial, one-dimensional light *as if national questions were simply ethnic questions*. A very prominent instance is the series of wars waged over former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Considering these wars the irrational reawakening of the mutual hatred between peoples that goes a long way back in history, characterising them as a historic settling of accounts between Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniacs is perhaps the dominant view or, in any case, extremely widespread. Very rarely did writers on those wars at least pose the question of why this historic hatred burst forth from within a situation that was predicated upon an exemplary coexistence of these same ethnic groups rarely seen in history, if not unique, that the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (1943-1992) represented. The idea that ethnic identity is more important than anything else is so deeply entrenched in people's minds that the reasoning may be summarised as follows: Ethnic wars simply happen. Full stop. They do not even need to be explained. As a matter of fact, when scrutinised from close up, one can easily see that the part played, on the one hand, both by the imperialist countries of Europe (first and foremost Germany and Austria and their ally the Vatican) and the United States and, on the other, the self-serving interests of the bureaucracy of each republic and the instinct of protection harboured by the peasantry of each people were the ammunition of that war.⁵

On the solemn occasion of the 110th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, it must be observed that it is very common to wilfully ignore the part played in that historic event by social classes, various layers and fractions of such classes, and imperialist forces that bear the mark of class struggle. The fact that the literature that examines the genocide seriously is of a nationalist nature on the Armenian side and a liberal nature on the Turkish side has played a decisive part in this is hardly worth explaining. Take, as an example, one of the best historically documented books on the issue by Vahakn Dadrian, one among many students of the genocide from within the Armenian diaspora. The subtitle (in the Turkish edition) is *Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia and the Caucasus*. The word "ethnic" is doubly significant. Even if Dadrian used the word "national" instead of "ethnic" that would still be significant. For in the period and the region he studies, the great struggles that led to the Armenian genocide were by no means exclusively national. But even "national" was not sufficient for Dadrian. For him, the sheer fact of the erasure of

⁵ See our treatment of the war in Yugoslavia in *Avrasya Savaşları. Körfezden Afganistan'a Yeni Dünya Düzeninin Kuruluşu* [Eurasia Wars. The Establishment of the New World Order from the Gulf War to Afghanistan], Istanbul: Belge, 2001, Chapter 3, pp. 63-142.

the Armenian “ethnic” group by the Turkish “ethnic” group was all that mattered (we shall duly see that since the Kurdish “ethnic” group was also involved the event was not purely one between Armenians and Turks). Let there be no mistake: his research is impeccable. Thus, what we have just said does not detract from the value of his work. It only goes to show that his point of view is decidedly problematic.

The Turkish side requires more attention. The primary force that has acted to catapult the question of the Armenian genocide on the public agenda and to make inroads into the domination of the denialist front here was, of course, Hrant Dink and the weekly newspaper *Agos* that was his brainchild and which he orchestrated skilfully for long years. But when we turn from the Armenian community to the Turks at large and pose the same question, we need to admit a simple truth from the outset: it was predominantly the liberals on the left who worked on the question, conducted research, and waged a fight. We also need to grant the further fact that it was those socialist parties and associations on the left that supported Erdoğan all the way up to the popular revolt of 2013 ignited by the Gezi Park uprising. There are certainly exceptions: the part played by the Belge publishing house, led by Ragıp Zarakolu and his long-deceased former wife Ayşe Zarakolu, was truly the work of a vanguard in this area. There are other exceptions from within the Marxist intelligentsia. But overall, it was left-wing liberals and activists who worked tenaciously to try and raise consciousness within Turkey on this historic catastrophe. It was also they who organised the epoch-making 2005 “Armenian Conference”. Writers such as Taner Akçam, Halil Berktaş, Ayhan Aktar, and others pursued the matter with perseverance and courage and shed light on many an aspect that had remained in the dark for decades. The various conferences that were held in Istanbul on the centenary of the 1909 Adana massacres, in Diyarbakir in 2011 on the part played by the Kurds in the genocide, and once again in Istanbul in 2014 on the forcible Islamisation of Armenians opened up new horizons, all of them due to the devotion of these liberal academics to the elucidation of the question. At all these conferences, a majority of the presentations were made by left liberals.

Having paid our tribute to them, let us also note that the liberals did not concede to Marxists what is due to them in the same fashion. It was Belge publishers that brought the Armenian question on the agenda for the first time in Turkey, having published a succession of books on the question almost single-handedly while everyone else kept silent. The left liberal team that controls the foundation established in memory of Hrant Dink has been giving out awards to a host of personalities each year, but refrained from awarding Ragıp Zarakolu, the surviving member of the two editors of Belge, while hypocritically according the same prize to Ahmet Altan, editor at the time of a supposedly left-wing liberal newspaper, who wilfully and maliciously repressed the publication of information emanating from the European Court of Human Rights with respect to Hrant Dink so that it would not put the Erdoğan government in a bind.

To return to our main topic, the fact that the material bases and the class struggle dimensions of the Armenian genocide have not been brought to the fore in the Turkish setting has certainly been a product of this fact of the predominance of liberal researchers in the study of this question. Let us once again proceed honestly

and concede again the fact that it would be unjust to claim that elements relating to class struggle do not play any part in the literature produced by liberal authors and researchers. To cite but the most striking instance, one of the works produced by Taner Akçam, the author most hostile to Marxism among the foremost students of the Armenian genocide, focuses directly on the question of the so-called *Emval-i Metruke* ("Abandoned Property"). The intention for turning to this aspect may be quite different from that of Marxists, but the question of the material bases of the genocide has thereby been brought under the microscope.⁶ Other such topics relating to material bases and class contradictions have been raised in a fragmented manner in this literature in terms of facts cited. But the issue of the material and class bases of the genocide appears in the literature developed in Turkey (and of course we are talking about the non-negationist literature here) **not as determining factors**, but as secondary, auxiliary or incidental aspects. What lies at the centre of the liberal literature is the "Turkish identity".⁷ It is what has been labelled in Turkish as the "İttihatist mentality", the concept referring to the mentality of the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (henceforth the CUP), to which we will have ample opportunity to turn to below. In other words, loyal to its own methodology, liberalism establishes the causal or determining mechanisms around the "universe of the mind" and, in solidarity with postmodernism, brings the question of identity to centre stage.

In clear contrast to this procedure, our approach will be to attempt to understand and explain the genocide and the road that led to the genocide within the framework of class contradictions and material interests. We will then see that the Turkish-Armenian conflict cannot be conceived as a question that can be tied to "ethnic" roots, let alone grasped on the level of "national" bases in the abstract. Each national question is laden with class. For this reason, one and the same national question is **interwoven out of a diversity of national questions**. The Armenian question is one thing for the traditional ruling classes of Ottoman society, another for the up-and-coming Turkish bourgeoisie, still another for the Kurdish tribal leaders. It is an entirely different question for the well-established, quasi-aristocratic Armenian large commercial and financial bourgeoisie, if such a question may really be said to exist for them. It is one question for the poor Armenian peasant of Anatolia and another for the Armenian intelligentsia emanating from the modern bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes rising in Eastern Armenia under the Czarist regime of Russia.

This article will try to comprehend the genocide as the combined product of these different national questions. We will also bring into the picture the political representatives of the different classes depicted above, i.e. their political parties as factors that influence the shaping of events. We will then see that, although the genocide cannot be reduced to class struggles, it still represents the particular path

6 Taner Akçam/Ümit Kurt, *Kanunların Ruhu. Emval-i Metruke Kanunlarında Soykırımın İzini Sürmek* [The Spirit of Laws. Tracing the Genocide in the Legislation on Abandoned Property], İstanbul: İletişim, 2012.

7 See, for instance, Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic. Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, London: Zed Books, 2004.

that a multitude of class struggles take under the specific conditions of the time and the space in which the genocide occurred.

We need to stress two points. First, this article is not a work of history that intends to convey to experts or to the general public the results of research carried out by its author. The author is no historian. The empirical material of an original character that he offers the reader is minimal. What we aim to do here is to reinterpret and analyse the already existing empirical material on the basis of the materialist conception of history and to adopt a political position that flows from that analysis.

The second point is connected to the first, but only partially. The idea, adopted by the negationists of Turkey, that the debate on the genocide had better be left to historians is not as “scientific”, we believe, as it sounds. The reason is that historians, Turkish historians in this specific case, have, in the guise of “objectivity” and “impartiality”, resorted to remaining silent or distorting the truth and, oftentimes, to outright lies. Hence, the fact that we are not a historian does not imply that we need to concur with them and doubt the claim that a genocide was perpetrated on Anatolian soil in 1915. For us, this is as glaring a fact as the genocide perpetrated against the Jews and the Roma by the Nazi regime in Germany. For eyes that wish to see this, numerous pieces of evidence have been presented in numerous sources. Beyond the voluminous international and domestic literature available on this score, even the “Open Letter” we publish in this issue on its own presents arguments and evidence sufficient to convince the reader. Thus, this article will not try to answer the question “was there a genocide?”⁸ It will touch upon certain points we deem important with respect to questions such as who is responsible for this genocide, who needs to answer for it or, in other words, who is the criminal in this vile act.

We can then turn to the heart of our topic.

1. Amira and peasant

In order to grasp the historical base on which the Armenian genocide arose, we need to dwell on two major particularities of Armenian history that define its specificity.⁹ The first particularity one should point out is that all throughout history the territory inhabited by the Armenians was the subject of rivalry between two or three powerful empires. In the modern age, this means the squeezing of Armenia between the Ottoman Empire and Czarist Russia. Despite the fact that historically there was always an Armenian population living in Iran, this country did not exert a pressure on Armenia as powerful as the former two in the modern age. What has just been said should force the reader from Turkey to check his or her geography anew. The country called Armenia consists of two parts, one in Anatolia or Asia

8 “Ermeni Soykırımı Tartışmaları. Gururu İncinen Türk İşçi ve Emekçilerine Açık Mektup” [The Controversy on the Armenian Genocide. Open Letter to Turkish Workers and Toilers Whose National Pride is Wounded]. This “Open Letter” was published in the same issue of *Devrimci Marksizm* (No. 23, Spring 2015) as this article.

9 We base our general account of Armenian history on the following two sources: Razmik Panosian, *The Armenians. From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, London: Hurst & Company, 2006 and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat. Armenia in Modern History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Minor (conventionally designated Western Armenia) and the other in the Caucasus region (called Eastern Armenia).¹⁰ It is a historically established political and legal convention to regard six Ottoman provinces of Eastern Anatolia as Western Armenia: Erzurum, Sivas, Van, Mamüretül Aziz (roughly today's province of Elazığ), Bitlis and Diyarbakir, as they are called today, these six provinces are labelled *Vilayât-i Sitte* in Ottoman parlance. As for Eastern Armenia, this corresponds roughly to today's independent Republic of Armenia, give or take Nagorno Karabakh. The history of the Armenian people can only be correctly situated as the combined and uneven development of these two geographic parts, Western and Eastern Armenia.

This state of being squeezed between the hammer and the anvil of two empires led to two significant historical outcomes. First, this people that distinguished itself from other ethnic groups through its unique alphabet and its own church (the Armenian Gregorian Church) became a nation without a state not from the outset but under the stress of centuries of experience. This status of a stateless nation is one factor that may partially explain the fact that within the decidedly multinational composition of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians became so integrated with the Turks as to be considered to be the *millet-i sâdıka*, in other words the "loyal nation". Having said that, let us stress the fact that this was one factor among many. We will return to this point.

A second particularity of Armenian history is seen in the fact that, like the Jews, the Armenians were an ancient trading nation from time immemorial. They cast their net surprisingly wide. At one end India was a home to the Armenians, at the other Venice stood out! The Armenian communities most powerful economically resided not in Yerevan, the present-day capital city of Armenia, or the largest centre of affairs in Western Armenia, Erzurum, but in Tbilisi, which is today the capital of Georgia, or, even more importantly, in Istanbul, home to the court of the Ottomans and formerly the capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire and later of Byzantium (under the appellation Constantinople). In other words, Armenian economic and cultural life flourished fundamentally outside of Armenia proper. At the basis of all this lies the fact that the Armenian class of merchants amassed great economic power from the Middle Ages on and settled in distant locations to establish an international trade network.

We need to draw two conclusions from this latter point. The first conclusion is that, almost as an irony of history, the Armenian people had wielded, from a very early historic stage, an almost natural skill of adaptation vis-à-vis the development of capitalism. Having formed colonies in a strikingly wide variety of geographic locations, the Armenians, on the one hand, naturally developed advanced linguistic skills very early on and, on the other, created, on the basis of the trade network already established, a commercial and financial bourgeoisie that grew swiftly as

¹⁰ The Caucasus is divided into two parts: the northern region lies within the borders of the Russian Federation; the southern region has been divided, quite controversially in parts, among three nations (Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan). The Caucasian Mountains form a natural frontier between the two parts. That is the basis for the name "Transcaucasia" that Russians have given to the southern half of the region. Seen from the Middle East (or Western Asia), this half cannot be called that name and is best called Southern Caucasus.

middlemen for Western European capital as capitalism progressed in the modern age. Moreover, this advanced economic culture made it possible for Armenians of more modest social standing to adapt much more rapidly than other peoples they co-existed with to new technologies, allowed the Armenian communities wherever they lived to develop artisans of the highest quality, and, in time, when an Ottoman proletariat started to come into being, cast Armenian workers to the forefront of the stratum of skilled workers in the struggle between classes.

The second conclusion is somewhat a corollary of the first. This is the rise, in Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, of an extremely powerful Armenian bourgeoisie from the 18th century on in the various areas of trade and finance as well as in the artisanal and technological spheres, designated with a special name peculiar only to this wing of the bourgeoisie, the *Amira*.¹¹ Ordinary words cannot describe the glory and splendour of this class (or class fraction). They are merchants and money-dealers and lapidists (skilful diamond artisans) and jewellers. Because they have proved their worth and because they are culturally so much more advanced than their peers, the Sultans entrust them with many an institution and make it possible for them to reach the zenith of power. They are accorded sumptuous titles such as the Amira of the Royal Mint or the Chamberlain of the Order of Money-Dealers or the Superintendent of Customs or commercial agent of the Anatolian Company of Goldsmiths or the chief merchant of the Head Vizier. They can be appointed to the higher echelons of the state bureaucracy. They were even entrusted with military positions: the post of “barutçubaşı” (i.e. head of the supply of ammunition for the army) remained the exclusive turf of the same Armenian family for two centuries. And they are, most notably, the head architects of the Court.

It would be more appropriate to consider this bourgeoisie akin to the fraction of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe that dealt with long-distance trade and finance in the early stages of capitalist development, more properly the mercantilist age, a fraction that bore certain aristocratic traits. This bourgeoisie and, in particular, its upper layers, carry out their business on the basis of concessions accorded by the Sultan’s government. Thus, their interests are deeply interwoven with the dealings of the state and the Court. They are fundamentally dependent on the favour of the Court. This led to the emergence of dynasties that are replicas of that which rules the Empire. At the top tier of the Amira, certain families monopolised certain industries within the Ottoman economy for close to two centuries (the 18th and the 19th).

The Amira Bezeiyan, characterised as the “Amira of the Amira”, both created a family tradition in the cloth and silk trade and was appointed as the Mint Amira by the Sultan. (The family name derives from two words, “bezci” meaning the dealer of cloth and the suffix “yan” meaning “son of” in Armenian.) The Dadyan family held the post of head supplier of ammunition to the army from the early 18th century on all the way to late 19th. The economic clout of this family continued well into the 20th century, all the way to mid-century, even though with the abolition of the Sultanate, the post of “head supplier of ammunition” itself became history. The

¹¹ The word is said to derive from the word “emir” in Turkish, meaning “khan” or “ruler”. That implies it is very much a term that is specific to the region.

Düzyan family stood at the head of the jewellery industry for two centuries. The Çerezian and Papazian families were extremely powerful actors in economic life throughout the 19th century. As for the Balyan family, they were the Court's head architects all throughout the 19th century and put their seal on Istanbul's modern architecture, in particular in the widely-acclaimed Pera neighbourhood. The position of these families resembles that of an aristocracy so closely that, despite the absence of a land-based aristocratic caste/class under the Ottomans in contrast to Western Europe, these families may be considered to be akin to a "*noblesse de robe*" of the later period of the *ancien régime* in France. The term "zadegân" ("magnate") in Ottoman Turkish would apply to no other social group so fittingly.¹²

It is self-evident that such economic power is bound to engender social power. The Church, which in the Ottoman social system of "millet" ("nation") was equipped with the prerogatives of worldly power, was brought, through a multitude of channels, under the control of the Amira. Is it not obvious that the Amira, which met all the economic needs of the Church, shouldered the costs of building new chapels and maintaining and mending the existing ones, shared out among its members all the seats on the boards of trustees of all the cathedrals, churches and chapels and thus fused its worldly power with divine power, financed all the schools, hospitals, hospices, and charities of the Armenian community, and dominated the cultural life of the Armenians would be in full control of the orientation of the community?

Thus, is it not obvious that an Armenian community under the domineering influence of the Amira, whatever nuances may subsist between the sentiments of different classes and of inhabitants of different regions, would nonetheless clearly bear the traces of the outlook of the Amira on the Ottoman Court? We have already pointed out that the Amira owed its socio-economic clout directly to its ties with the Court. Its interests were woven with a million threads into the fabric of the Ottoman socio-economic order. Can there be anything surprising in the appellation *millet-i sâdika* (the "loyal nation") used for the Armenian community when this community was under the domination of this class? It is, then, possible to reach the following conclusion with mathematical precision: At least until the late 19th century, for the Armenians of Istanbul, and at their head the Amira, there was **no "Armenian question"** worth discussing. There is no national question in this context.

This is not true for other sections of the Armenian community. For one thing, the development of the Armenian bourgeoisie in the Caucasus pursued another course. There the old class of merchants oriented itself gradually towards integration with the circuit of modern capitalism, initiating thus a process of transition toward an industrial bourgeoisie. This process matured with the formation of a capitalist class in the manufacturing industry in Tbilisi, first and foremost in the textiles industry, and in the petroleum industry and its derivatives in Baku. As the Armenian bourgeoisie was morphing into an industrial one, a proletariat was

¹² The source of this information is the following: Levon Panos Dabağyan, *Geçmişten Günümüze Millet-i Sâdika-I. Osmanlı Ermenileri*, [The Loyal Nation from Past to Present-I. Ottoman Armenians] Istanbul: Yedirenk, 2010, pp. 229-378. Furthermore, see Panossian, op. cit., pp. 85-86 and 148-151.

naturally coming into existence at the other pole. Armenians also took the lion's share in this new proletariat. That is why the ideological currents of the age and the political organisations that these gave birth to made their leap forward in the Armenian community in the Caucasus rather than Istanbul and Western Armenia. The intellectual layers that came out of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie became the bearers of these modern ideologies, of nationalism and socialism, and to a much lesser extent of liberalism. The Armenian proletariat, for its part, engaged in political organising. We would like to point out that we have not mentioned Eastern Armenia, but focused on the Caucasus, since this development was not confined to Eastern Armenia proper, but was even more marked in Tbilisi and Baku, where the Armenian bourgeoisie had historically been more powerful.

The history of Armenian nationalism extends in fact way back into the past. The first phase of the development of nationalism has always and everywhere been marked by the formation of a nationalist intelligentsia and the reordering of language, history, literature, art and folklore in line with the new nationalist ideology. Thanks to the internationally dispersed character of the class of merchants sustaining their existence within the cells of precapitalist societies, with the Armenians this process started and progressed in the diaspora. The publishing activities conducted in India were accompanied by the work of the religious order named the "Mkhitarists" on the Armenian language, literature, and history in Venice and Vienna.¹³

These efforts reached their apogee in the 18th century, followed by the spread of nationalism among the masses in the 19th century. The rise of Armenian nationalism relied on three elements that had served to hold the Armenian people in unity despite the vast geographic distances that separated various communities: the Armenian language, the unique alphabet of that language, and the Armenian Gregorian Church. That is why Armenian nationalism includes certain trends that largely rely on ethnic characteristics and claim the existence of the Armenian nation since time immemorial. Despite its vast wealth and its cultural advancement, the contribution of the Istanbul Armenian community to the development of this nationalism is limited. In fact, Migirdiç Kirimyan (also known as Kirimyan Hayrik or "Father Kirimyan", father here standing not for a priest, which Kirimyan as a matter of fact was, but a "baba", a paternal figure), who is, historically speaking, one of the most important leaders of Armenian nationalism, while he was serving as the Bishop of Istanbul between 1869 and 1873, was forced to fight against the reaction of the Amira and the Church hierarchy against what was considered to be his "excessive" zeal to ameliorate the situation of the Armenian peasants of Anatolia.¹⁴

But the great chasm is not between Istanbul and the Caucasus. It is between Istanbul and the Armenian peasantry of Eastern Anatolia (i.e. Western Armenia). The Armenians do not form a majority in the *Vilayât-ı Sitte* (the Six Provinces already mentioned). The absolute number of Armenians living in this region is in fact a matter of great controversy. There are great differences between the censuses

¹³ Thanks to the work of this religious order, the first Armenian dictionary was published in Venice between 1749 and 1769, much earlier than similar dictionaries in many Western European languages. (Panossian, op. cit., pp. 101-109).

¹⁴ Panossian, op. cit., p. 174n.

taken by the Church and those taken by the Ottoman state. But even those sources that cite the highest figures for the Armenian population do not claim the existence of a higher Armenian population relative to the Muslim population made up of the Turks and the Kurds (and, after their great exodus of 1864 from Russia, of the Circassians). The Armenians are a minority all around relative to the Muslim population, but they form a plurality. Within this population, beyond the merchant, the clergy, the artisan, and other petty-bourgeois elements, it is the peasantry that is the greatest majority. This peasantry is very much Ottoman, in a very fundamental sense. Apart from the broken Armenian they use during mass on Sunday, these peasants communicate in Turkish. But under the force of immensely oppressive condition they face in the last third of the 19th century, they gradually turn to nationalism as a defence mechanism.

It is vital to understand the factors at play here. Before the Reform Firman (the *Islahat* Firman) of 1856, the Armenian peasant, just like the rest of the non-Muslim population of the empire, used to pay a head tax called *cizye* in addition to the regular tax it paid along with the Muslim *reaya*. Since the Reform Firman of 1839 (the *Tanzimat*), as well as that of 1856 (the *Islahat* Firman), stipulated formal equality between the Muslim and the non-Muslim, the *cizye* was repealed. But because the non-Muslims were not eligible for military draft, they started to pay a tax in lieu of military service.¹⁵ However, the question went farther than this additional tax. In the last third of the 19th century, the Armenian peasantry started to live as if it were liable to a regime of double taxation.

The fact that due to the financial crisis of the Ottoman state, in this period tax farming had become more and more cruel already implied that exploitation reached new heights. But even more important was the pillage on the Armenian peasants exercised by the chiefs of the Kurdish tribes as well as the begs (*beyler*) of the Circassians who had fled Russian massacres and come to Anatolia, some of whom had been settled in the *Vilayât-ı Sitte*. This made life unbearable for the Armenian peasant.¹⁶ All the petitioning done by the latter was almost invariably ignored. (We will have occasion to mention below that especially after 1878 this became official state policy.) This was a matter of double exploitation. It is crystal clear that the Armenian peasantry is being super-oppressed by being pushed to the lowest rung of the class hierarchy simply because he happened to be a Christian subject of the Sultan. On top of the extraction of the surplus of the peasant by the tax farmers of the absolutist, yet semi-colonial, Ottoman state, with an augmented intensity, came the pillage of the Kurdish tribal chiefs and the Circassian clan (*oymak*) begs, leaders of peoples who still lived under pre-capitalist relations of production, some still surviving as nomadic marauders. There was no other way left for the Armenian peasant but to defend himself qua Armenian since this was precisely what lay at the basis of his super-oppression.

One has to be blind not to see that here national belonging in this instance owes

¹⁵ When, in the wake of the 1908 revolution, military service was extended to the non-Muslim population, all additional forms of taxation on them were eliminated.

¹⁶ It should be remembered that the so-called Debt Administration, a sign of the bankruptcy of the public finance of the Ottomans, was established in 1881.

its entire *raison d'être* to the laws of class struggle. In Western Armenia, *Armenian nationalism is self-defence action on the part of the Armenian peasantry*. Two of the elements that true Armenian nationalism regards as indispensable elements of the Armenian nation do not even exist here! The Armenian peasant speaks not Armenian but Turkish and, because he is (and *a fortiori* she is) illiterate, the unique alphabet of the Armenian language does not even make its presence felt to his or her consciousness!

Hence, taken as a whole, it might be said that at least three different attitudes had now crystallised within the ranks of the Armenian people. The Istanbul community, under the domination of the Amira class stood against the rise of nationalism within the community. Within the rising bourgeoisie and proletariat in the Caucasus a cultural and political brand of nationalism, at times blended with socialism in the case of the proletariat, as we will see in a moment, was taking form. Finally, Armenian nationalism among the Anatolian Armenian peasantry, nationalism was becoming a survival strategy.

2. The Armenian revolutionary movement: nationalism and socialism

Interestingly enough, the leadership of the self-defence action of the Western Armenian peasantry was provided by political movements from Eastern Armenia. Having received their political education from Russian narodnism (populism) and to a certain extent also from Russian Marxism, the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals of Eastern Armenia organised to be the saviours of the Western Armenian peasants. As is well-known, a revolutionary ebullition arose in Czarist Russia from the 1860s on. The revolutionary movement first organised within a populist (Narodnik) current on the basis of the slogan “go to the people”, a current that also had recourse to individual terrorism. This current would give rise to a powerful political party called the Socialist Revolutionaries (abbreviated as the SRs) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Marxism also took its first steps in Russia from the 1880s on. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), out of which the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin would somewhat later emerge, was to be founded at the turn of the century.

The Armenian revolutionary movement was formed to a great extent under the influence of the Russian one.¹⁷ This is a movement in which narodnism and Marxism, nationalism and socialism co-existed in uneasy fashion, of which one or the other came to dominate in different epochs and different organisations. As a matter of fact, the first Armenian party that was founded was Armenakan, a liberal bourgeois party whose foundations were laid in Van, a province that was part of the *Vilayât-ı Sitte*, in 1885. This was followed by the establishment of the Hunchak (or Hunchakian) Party in 1886 in Geneva. The Dashnak (or Dashnaksutun) Party,

¹⁷ The major source in Turkish on the Armenian revolutionary movement is the following: Anaide Ter-Minassian, *Ermeni Devrimci Hareketinde Milliyetçilik ve Sosyalizm 1887-1912* [Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement 1887-1912], tr. Mete Tunçay, Istanbul: İletişim, 2012.

which could well be regarded as the strongest and the most durable Armenian political party and whose full name is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, was started in Eastern Armenia in 1890. It would be interesting to compare these dates with that of the birth of the Young Turk movement. The Committee of Union and Progress (the CUP, although that was not the original name the movement donned itself) was established in 1889, almost coinciding with the foundation of the Armenian parties. However, socialism had almost no influence on this Turkish revolutionary movement, as opposed to the Armenian parties.

Leaving aside Armenakan, which had no penchant at all towards Marxism, we can say that the Hunchak was closer to the ideology of Marxism while the Dashnak felt stronger affinity to narodnism. But this difference is relative. Moreover, it must be remembered that the Hunchak, despite leading some important struggles in the 1890s, lost much influence in the early 20th century under the weight of its own internal contradictions and it was the Dashnak that took the upper hand within the Armenian revolutionary movement. We can thus reach the following conclusion: Overall, the Armenian revolutionary movement was a kind of peasant socialism for which the national liberation question of the Armenian people held primacy. This general characterisation should not mask the fact that at times (for instance in its 1907 programme) the Dashnak came very close to Marxism, highlighted the class aspect of the struggle, and emphasised the idea that the gist of the matter lies in the emancipation of workers and toilers of no matter which nation from exploitation. Those who, under the hold of Turkish nationalism, strive to depict the Dashnak as a terrorist movement blinded by its hostility to the Turks hide from view not only the sensitivity of the Dashnak to class struggle, but also its collaboration with the Young Turk movement both before and immediately after the 1908 revolution, thus posing as a model to organisations of oppressed nations with a priority emphasis on national liberation in terms of revolutionary strategy. Going even further, one should point out that the Dashnak joined hands with the Bolsheviks and the left SRs during the Baku Commune of 1918, the first victory of the October revolution in the Caucasus region. It is true that in the end, spurred on by the threat posed by the Turkish army, it made the great mistake of taking refuge under the protection of British imperialism and thus caused the Commune to collapse. But for several months at least it strove for the setting up of Soviet power in the region. This is the point of rupture during which the transition from a revolutionary to a counter-revolutionary character for Dashnak was brought about. It will in time become the party of the bourgeois class of the Armenian diaspora on a progressive scale and raise the banner of an anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary orientation. The history of the Dashnak is sharply divided between a revolutionary and a counter-revolutionary politics before and after the Baku Commune.

At the basis of these oscillations lies the fact that the Armenian socialist movement in general and the Dashnak in particular are each marked deeply by peasant socialism or, in even starker terms, petty-bourgeois socialism. The impact of proletarian socialism was restricted among the Armenian people. The Marxist movement grew by leaps and bounds in Czarist Russia in the early 20th century, but unfortunately this influence was not felt to the same degree within the ranks of the

Armenian people. The so-called “specifist” current, built entirely on the basis of Marxist ideas, remained extremely weak.

Bolshevism, for its part, was not able to penetrate any sections of Armenian society apart from the petroleum proletariat in Baku. In this latter enterprise the pride of place goes to Stepan Shaumian and his comrades. On the other hand, in Tbilisi, where the Armenian proletariat also made its presence felt, it was the other wing of the RSDLP, the Mensheviks, who had the upper hand. As for the population of Yerevan and its hinterland, they had the tendency to emphasise on the whole the suffering of their peasant brethren of Western Armenia rather than questions of establishing socialist power.

We are of the opinion that the Bolshevik Party made a mistake by approaching the Armenian question in a manner that sidelined the national question, an approach that was ironically marked by the kind of abstract internationalism adopted by Rosa Luxemburg and not at all consonant with Lenin’s keen eye for national oppression in every concrete situation. There was probably a very rightful reason for this: the Armenian question had been instrumentalised by imperialism and, in particular, the Czarist administration up until the Great War broke out. However, when we observe to what extent the national contradiction between Turkish *cum* Azerbaijani nationalism, on the one hand, and Armenian nationalism, on the other, shaped historical developments so dramatically across a vast region that extended from Istanbul all the way to Yerevan and Baku, it becomes an inescapable task, with the advantage of hindsight, to ask the question of whether or not the Bolsheviks could have adopted a different policy on this question. Moreover, this is no matter of a distant past. This fact becomes obvious as soon as one remembers the bloodshed over Nagorno Karabakh in this new century. Immediately on the heels of the most delicate national question of Anatolia and Mesopotamia that is the Kurdish question, the most entrenched national question of this region is the Armenian/Turkish and Armenian/Kurdish combination. It is true that there is Georgia and its contradictions with the Abkhaz and the Ossets, as well as Russian interference in these contradictions. But the most explosive one is the Turkish/Armenian question. We will return to the Bolsheviks’ policy in the early 20th century and try to draw lessons for the future.

At this stage we wish to broaden our view and dwell on another aspect of the development of socialism within Ottoman territory. Petty-bourgeois in character though it may be, the sheer fact of its being a socialist movement made it possible for the Armenian movement to contribute to the struggles of the working class and the spread of socialist ideas in the empire as a whole. Armenian socialist members of parliament elected in the aftermath of the revolution of 1908 presented draft laws addressing certain working class demands (strikes, working hours etc.) and, uncowed by their being members of a minority population, stood their ground against the conservative majority of deputies on both immediate questions of bread and butter and, in the background to all of this, on the issue of socialism. It is often said on the left that socialists entered parliament for the first time in 1965, when the Workers’ Party of Turkey (WPT) had 15 members elected, but this is nothing but the mimicking on the left of those historians regarding Ottoman history through an

exclusively Turkish lens and thus impoverishing the experience of socialism in this country.

Even though very little material has seen the light of day so far, the parliamentary minutes show clearly that the Armenian socialist MPs of the time waged a struggle as resolute as the WPT representatives after 1965 and that, moreover, they were confronted by the same kind of aggression and repression on the part of the parliamentary majority of deputies.¹⁸

To read Ottoman history through the reductionist and impoverishing Turkish lens results in a misconception regarding both the history of bourgeois revolution in Turkey and the history of the development of the socialist movement in this country. We will return to the former, i.e. the part played by the non-Turkish communities living under the empire in the bourgeois-revolutionary movement in Turkey below. As we have already talked extensively on the socialist movement so far, let us make an additional observation. The socialist movement in Turkey was first launched by non-Muslims. Not only Armenians, but also Bulgarians, Jews, Greeks of Anatolia and Greeks of Salonica contributed very largely to the development of socialism in Turkey proper. There are four organisations that are founded on Ottoman territory that are members of the Second International, to whose foundation Engels contributed and of which Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and their parties, as well as many other revolutionary Marxists were members.

Alongside Hunchak and Dahsnak are members of the International the Salonica Workers' Federation¹⁹ and the *Tetebbuat-ı İçtimaiyye Cemiyeti* (Association for the Study of Society) organised by the Greeks of Istanbul. Apart from these, the so-called Inner Macedonia Revolutionary Organisation, whose struggle played a great part in the 1908 revolution as well as the Macedonian insurrection of 1903, was in essence under the influence of both the so-called "Narrow" and "Broad" fractions of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Labour Party. So, Armenians (Hunchak and Dashnak), Jews and Greeks (the Salonica Socialist Federation), Bulgarians (Macedonia), and the Greeks of Istanbul (Study of Society) all organised within the socialist movement.²⁰

Why is this important? To ignore the existence of these socialist foci implies an oversight that leaves the alternative to the Turkish nationalism that will flourish from 1913 on in the CUP movement in the form of deportation and genocide of Armenians in the dark, although this is an alternative that is very real. On the banners of all these organisations that have been mentioned is written the watchword "Federation"!

18 Dr. Fethi Tevetoğlu, *Türkiye'de Sosyalist ve Komünist Faâliyetler* [Socialist and Communist Activities in Turkey], Ankara, 1967 [publisher unnamed], pp. 34-54.

19 The main source on this topic is: Georges Haupt/Paul Dumont (eds.), *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalist Hareketler* [Socialist Movements in the Ottoman Empire], tr. Tuğrul Artunkal, Istanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977.

20 The major source of information regarding all these movements and organisations is: Mete Tunçay/Erik Jan Zürcher (eds.), *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik (1876-1923)* [Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire], tr. Mete Tunçay, 5th ed., Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010.

The Salonica Socialist Federation²¹ and the Inner Macedonia Revolutionary Movement²² defended a Balkans federation while the Hunchak and the Dashnak advocated federation or other forms of decentralisation in Anatolia itself. The claim that the Dashnak was a separatist organisation before 1915 is an utter lie! (One has to take a more nuanced view of the Hunchak perhaps.) The Dashnak's programme is reminiscent of Abdullah Ocalan's current programme of "local self-government", which implies the abandonment of his earlier deep-seated separatism in favour of a model fashioned after the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe.

Secondly, even after 1915, the Armenian people provided a very high number of cadres to the Turkish revolutionary and socialist movement out of any proportion relative to the size of the Armenian population that remained in contemporary Turkey in the wake of the genocide. The Armenians that were active in the historic Communist Party of Turkey (no relation to the current party of the same name), those who took part in the Maoist movements of the 1970s, and some of the leading cadres of Turkish Trotskyism to this day are testimony to the resilience of the early engagement of the Armenian people with socialism. In short, the Armenian community of Turkey has been a fountain that nourished socialism and the proletarian movement in Turkey from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries!

3. The despot and the tribe

Those left-wing liberals who debase and demean the 1908 revolution, the first revolution that took place on Anatolian soil in the modern period (at the level of the entire Ottoman territory, the first revolution was, of course, the Greek revolution of 1821), certainly find the most incontrovertible evidence for this act of denigration in the 1915 genocide. Later on, we shall have occasion to show that a much more nuanced assessment of the relationship between these two historic events is in order than that assumed by liberal clichés. At this point, we need to touch upon briefly the prehistory of the genocide. The liberal camp at times broadens its attack on the revolution of 1908 to even a defence put up on behalf of the despot of the late 19th century, the "Red Sultan" of bloody hands in the European imaginary, Abdulhamid II. That is yet another reason for us to take a look at his reign. Dwelling upon that period will also offer us the possibility of taking a first glance at the early formation of Turkish nationalism, something we have already done for the Armenians.

All throughout his reign (1876-1909), his policy in the area we are dealing with in this article can plainly be depicted in the following manner: open up the channels to allow the Kurdish tribe to assault the Armenian peasantry with a view to grasp a part of their surplus product, this whole strategy aiming for the rebinding of the Kurdish

21 See "Osmanlı Sosyalistlerinin Balkan Federasyonu Çağrısı" [Call for a Balkan Federation by Ottoman Socialists], *Gerçek*, October 2012. See further Haupt/Dumont, op. cit., p. 134.

22 This idea is very influential among socialists in this period and, in particular, among Macedonian revolutionaries. See, for instance, *Une confédération orientale comme solution de la question d'orient* [An Eastern Confederation as the Solution to the Eastern Question], Paris: Plon-Nourrit & Cie, 1905. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ragıp Zarakolu for bringing this rare book to my attention.

tribes, which had started to rise in revolt against the Sultan's power since early 19th century, to the Ottoman socio-economic and political order at this end of that same century. As was already mentioned, the Kurdish tribal chiefs, in their capacity as a pre-capitalist ruling class, had already started marauding the Armenian peasantry's surplus product from the 1860s on. This, we have pointed out, led the Armenian peasantry to take refuge in Armenian nationalism as its only route of salvation.

Naturally, this conflict was exploited by the so-called Great Powers who now were looking forward to an eventual dividing up of the greater part of the territory of this "Sick Man of Europe". As the *Soviet Encyclopaedia* of 1926 summarised very aptly, the "Armenian question" displayed two dimensions:

In its external aspect, one sees the weakening of Turkey by the Great Powers by supporting centrifugal forces within Turkey and thus rendering the country much more amenable to colonisation. In its domestic aspect, this issue takes the form of the self-determination of the Armenian nation under the leadership of the Armenian bourgeoisie and consequently in line with the interests of this same bourgeoisie.²³

We cannot go along the excessive emphasis on the importance of the Armenian bourgeoisie, but the characterisation of the question by pointing to its differential manifestation externally and domestically is quite correct. Once the intervention of foreign powers started, Abdulhamid naturally could not yield to demands for democratic reforms from the point of view of the security and stability of the absolutist state. In place of this he carried the situation one step forward. He created a military force that would render the repression and the exploitation the tribes exercised upon the Armenian peasantry a durable one: this was called the "Hamidiye Regiments". This military force established in 1890 engaged in an unceasing series of massacres against the Armenians between 1894-1896. Although an exact figure cannot be provided, there are claims of up to 300 thousand victims for these years. It is clear that the nickname the "Red Sultan" attributed to Abdulhamid derives from these atrocities committed against the Armenian peasantry. This is the monster on which some left-wing liberals heap praise, even if occasionally.

The significance of the 1894-1896 massacres is two-fold. First, they reveal unambiguously the part played by the Kurds in the cleansing of the Armenians from Anatolian soil. Below, we will also be looking at the manner in which Kurdish tribes engaged in collaboration and complicity on this score with Turkish official forces and later with the cadres that represented the bourgeois revolution.

Secondly, the Abdulhamid atrocities became later the basis for a debate on whether there was a continuity between the 1894-1896 massacres and the 1915 genocide. In our opinion, these two historic events share a common point (and are linked with by an intermediary link in the 1909 Adana atrocities): the repression and annihilation of the Armenians on the basis of atrocities that bring together the

²³ Mehmet Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden 150 Belgede Ermeni Meselesi* [The Armenian Question in 150 Documents from the Russian State Archives], Enlarged edition, Istanbul: Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, 2012, p. 29. It should be recalled that we are dealing with back translation here.

Turkish and Kurdish ruling classes.

However, the differences between 1894-1896 and 1915 are of greater weight. First, although the Abdulhamid massacres dealt an extremely heavy blow to the Armenian peasantry, there are no signs that suggest that there was an intention to extirpate the Armenians from Anatolian soil. In other words, there is no historic evidence that shows that there was the aim of creating a “final solution”, which was indubitably a clear objective in the 1915 genocide. Secondly, and related to this, the atrocities were committed exclusively in the *Vilayât-ı Sitte*. In contrast to the genocide of 1915, there were no such activities organised in Central or Western Anatolia. Thirdly, and historically speaking perhaps most importantly, there are no indications that there was an intent to dispossess the Armenian masses completely and systematically. As we shall see, the 1915 legislation on so-called “Abandoned Property” will aim precisely at this. Why do we say that historically speaking this last element is the most important? Because this clearly shows that the Abdulhamid atrocities were not a final reckoning between the two major (Armenian and Muslim-Turkish) wings of the rising bourgeoisie on Anatolian soil, but simply a struggle to death between the sedentary peasantry of the *Vilayât-ı Sitte* that happened to be Armenian and the pre-capitalist tribes roaming the same region that happened to be Kurdish.

4. Imperialism and national liberation

In the saga of the Armenian national liberation movement that lasted close to half a century, which started with the first commotions of the 1860s, gained traction in the wake of the Hagia Stephanos and Berlin Treaties of 1878, organised people’s rebellions in the 1890s and ended in the disaster of 1915, relations with imperialism are of primary consequence. The place reserved for the Great Powers by the Armenian national movement in its overall strategy and the consequences that flowed from this offer invaluable lessons to national liberation movements in all parts of the world, but especially in our own region.

We already indicated above that despite the existence of a certain rapport to Marxism as well, Armenian revolutionary parties were truly organisations of petty-bourgeois (peasant) nature under the influence of Russian narodnism. A further effect of the Russian Narodnik movement on the Armenian parties was their adoption of individual terrorism as a method of political struggle. This kind of action usually creates in the masses the impression that they are face to face with an extremely radical organisation. But many organisations that have recourse to terrorist methods do so with the ultimate aim of forcing the ruling class to admit them into the existing socio-political order. This is true for the Armenian parties as well.

All sources concur on the fact that the Armenian parties carried out terroristic actions in order to draw the attention of European powers to the Armenian question and that for them the effort to convince the Great Powers to apply pressure on the Ottoman government in their favour was of *strategic* value. This approach certainly corresponded with certain aspects of the real situation on the field. All the European states, starting with Russia, had been busy for some time now putting to use the

national grievances and demands of both the Balkan peoples and the Armenians in order to put the Ottoman state in a difficult position, to wrest concessions from it, to cut the ties of these oppressed peoples with the Ottomans and bring them under their own control, and, in the extreme case, to bring down the entire Ottoman state. The empire had already lost its control over some Balkan peoples in a succession of insurrections, revolutions, and wars of independence (Greece 1821-1829 and Serbia 1834-35). Bulgaria had become an autonomous state, though not completely independent, in 1878. The *Tanzimat* and *Islahat* Firmans of 1839 and 1856 respectively were the product of the immense pressure on the part of the European powers to force the Ottoman state to grant equal rights for its non-Muslim subjects. Greece had received a generalised kind of support, but regarding the Slavic peoples of the Balkans (the Serbs and the Croats and the Bulgarians and the Macedonians etc.), it was Czarist Russia that was at the forefront of the lot.

And the Czars eyed not only the Balkans to the west and Western Armenia to the east. The most important prize for them would be the Straits, i.e. the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, paths to warmer seas. So, concerning Russia it was almost clear that it was the full destruction of the Ottoman state that was on the agenda. It was in order to prevent Russia from achieving this objective that during the Crimean War of 1853-1856 Britain and France joined hands with the Ottomans. Britain was, so far, trying to protect the unity of the Ottoman state not only against the Russian Czar but against all powers. The main motif here was to prevent any great power to gain control over the route to India, the crown of the British empire.

Russia made its most radical move during the 1877-1878 war. As a result, the Ottomans had to concede a certain measure of European supervision not only over the Balkans but as well over Armenia in Eastern Anatolia. Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty (1878) did impose significant restrictions on Russian interests relative to the provisions of the Hagia Stephanos Treaty that was signed between Russia and the Ottomans immediately before it, but at the same time it transformed the Armenian question into an object of international law. From then on, the Armenian question was going to revolve around the application of the international oversight stipulated by this Article 61. The appointment of foreign observers to the *Vilayât-ı Sitte* region will become a central bone of contention. Two supervisors will finally be appointed, but before they could take over their mission the Great War will break out and genocide will win the day.

The question that has to be posed now is the following: how was it possible that, although the protection of their rights became a duty and a priority for the European Concert of states, the Armenians were subjected within the four decades that followed upon the heels of the Berlin Treaty (1878) to two major (1894-96 and 1915) and one local (Adana 1909) massacres? The answer is two-fold. First, the aims that imperialist states adopt for the short run may very well become obsolete when the overall interests of the states in question change in the medium and long terms. In effect, it is because the overall policies of each of these states have changed during the decade of the 1890s that the Armenians were left alone to face their predicament. As for 1915, it is now the time of the world war and many European states (the Allies) are already at war with the Ottomans, but wartime facilitates such

massacres.

Secondly, some of the imperialist states were bound to the Ottoman state through a web of interests of a strategic nature. Wilhelmine Germany found itself precisely in this predicament. As we will later on delve deeper into this aspect of the question, we make do with simply indicating this at this stage. Let us only mention this: in both major massacres, whether under Abdulhamid II or under the CUP government during the war, the policy pursued by Germany tremendously comforted the Ottomans.

Having conceived of the pressure of the imperialist states on the Ottomans as an instrument of *strategic* value for gaining Armenian national rights, the Armenian revolutionary movement thus led its own people to a quandary that resulted in hundreds of thousands, even millions of deaths and the definitive extirpation of the Armenians of Western Armenia from their age-old home. This aspect of the question is often overlooked. It is, however, a lesson of immense value for all national liberation struggles. Laying the hopes of oppressed nations in the intervention of imperialist powers is usually defended in the name of “realism”. Those who stand up against this are accused of rigid defence of principles where tactical flexibility is required. The century-long experience of two peoples in the combined regions of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus presents important lessons on this score.

During the Great War, the Palestinians, as well as their Arab brethren in other regions, harboured the dream of freedom from Ottoman yoke under British protection. Today, more than a century later, the Palestinians still suffer immensely under colonial rule. They are, in fact, now being subjected to the same predicament as the Armenians a century ago. Genocide is once again on the order of the day. As for the Armenians, the political forces of this oppressed nation decided to tie the fate of the liberation struggle to the caprices of imperialist states. In the end their people were subjected to a genocide in front of the eyes of the entire world. One hundred ten years later, the “rules-based” and “democratic” system of Western imperialism has still not been able to incontrovertibly register that what they suffered was a genocide. So, this is what is called a “realistic strategy”! Beware oppressed peoples of the 21st century. *De te fabula narratur!*

5. Bourgeois revolution and the question of nationalities

The 1908 revolution, the first to occur on what is now the territory of the Turkish republic, differed from the following one, the 1918-1923 revolution, both by the participation to the end of the great masses of the people in the revolution and by its multinational character. Many incidents experienced in Anatolia and the Balkans from 1904-1905 on, ranging from tax revolts to mutinies in military barracks, clearly indicated that the small merchants and the peasantry were in a very restive mood. After the victory of the revolution on 24 July 1908, a strike wave of a scale not to be seen again for the next half century took all big cities in its grip and demonstrated that the working class was an integral part of the revolution.

As for the multinational character of the revolution: the denomination “Young Turk” is decidedly inappropriate for this revolution since it attributes the revolution

solely, or at least primarily, to the Turks. But this is patently untrue. The insurrection of 1908 can, in fact, be considered a continuation of the insurrection organised by the Macedonian revolutionary movement in 1903. It is also a product of the actions of the Armenian revolutionary movements against Abdulhamid II. The Turkish heroes of the revolution (Enver and Niyazi Begs) were in fact military officers sent by the Sultan's government to quell the Macedonian guerilla war after the 1903 insurrection, but turned their weapons against the Sultan, a fine instance of Lenin's "revolutionary defeatism" *avant la lettre*.

The 1908 revolution can best be designated by the concept of "Liberty" that it used frequently to describe itself: the "Freedom Revolution" is how we call it. This name is also pertinent for another reason: the 1908 revolution paved the way towards a fraternisation among the nations of the empire, if only for a few years, and the efforts to build a more democratic future in the country in unity. On 24 July, the Turkish heroes of the revolution, Enver and Niyazi, embraced the Macedonian revolutionaries they had been chasing on mountain tops only a few months ago. The CUP struggled hand in hand with the Hunchak and the Dashnak against the despotic regime of Abdulhamid II. There were Macedonians and Bulgarians within the so-called Action Army that rushed from Salonica to Istanbul on 31 March 1909, when a counter-revolutionary uprising threatened to overthrow the gains of the revolution.

Let us try to explain briefly the import of the contribution made to the 1908 revolution by the Armenian revolutionary movement over the years. The first move of the Armenian revolutionary movement resulted in a series of revolts between 1894 and 1897 that spread over different regions and shook the socio-political order. It was first the Sasun Armenians that rose in rebellion (the reader is asked to remember the explanation we have already provided with respect to the plight of the Armenian peasant). The Hunchak played a serious part in this insurrection. It is an established historical fact that the Macedonian revolution that started one year after the Sasun rebellion was inspired by the latter (despite the immense distance that separates the two geographic locations). The Macedonian revolution, during which an entire people rose up, in contrast to the Sasun rebellion, which remained a local affair, started as a guerilla war.

In 1895, in the predominantly Armenian neighbourhood of Kumkapi in Istanbul, thousands of Armenians gathered for a peaceful protest against the ongoing massacre of Armenians in Eastern Turkey (Western Armenia). But even before the march set out, they were mowed down by the "security forces". It needs to be stressed that this crowd was composed not of the members of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie of the Istanbul Armenian community, marked as these were by the complacency of the Amira culture of the capital, but of Armenian porters, boat rowers, and other poor strata of the population that had fled the massacres in the east and taken refuge in Istanbul, a historic precedent, one would say to the Kurdish migrant population of Istanbul in our times!

The 1896-1897, the Cretan insurrection made a great contribution to this revolutionary wave. In the same year of 1896, the Armenians of Zeytun in the Southeast of Turkey (near today's city of Kahramanmaraş) rose up.

Overall, we have not had the opportunity to look into this series of revolts and

insurrections sufficiently, so we will make do with a provisional judgment: The period 1894-1897 is the first widespread wave of bourgeois revolutionary commotion in the Ottoman state specifically on the territory of what is now Turkey.²⁴ If this is true, then the 1894-1896 massacres perpetrated by Abdulhamid II, making use of the Hamidiye Regiments, are tantamount to a counter-revolutionary operation. We repeat that we advance this idea as a provisional hypothesis. If this is true, then this is another aspect that distinguishes the 1894-1896 massacre from the 1915 genocide for in the latter case there can be no talk of a revolutionary upsurge.

In all the Armenian episodes of the revolutionary wave of 1894-1897, the leadership of the Hunchak is the rule. The only exception to the rule is the raid on the Ottoman Bank in the business district of Istanbul in 1896. The Ottoman Bank was established by French banking capital with a view to function as the central bank of the Ottoman state. The headquarters of the bank in the neighbourhood still named Galata was raided by a Dashnak commando and after a lengthy occupation of the building the militants were promised safe conduct to go abroad in return for lifting the occupation. The Ottoman Bank raid was the only move that had the character of a purportedly heroic vanguard operation divorced from the masses during the great wave of struggle of the Armenians. Its objective was, as we explained earlier, precisely to draw European attention to the Armenian question. It may of course be said that this is very much comprehensible, given the fact that when the raid was carried out, hundreds of thousands of Armenians had fallen victim to the atrocities of the Hamidiye Regiments in the space of two years' time. Any revolutionary may, under such circumstances, resort to what seems to be hopeless acts of vengeance and retribution. But the problem lies not in the action but in the *aim* of that action: the petitioning of imperialist powers.

The second revolutionary wave extended from 1903 to 1908. Within this wave may be found the transformation of the Macedonian revolution from a guerrilla movement into a mass popular revolution, the continuation of the guerrilla movement when the popular revolution was arrested by the violent reaction of the Ottoman army, the organisation of tax revolts in the Balkans, Anatolia, even in the Arab geography, widespread unrest and mutinies in military units, and the turning of the weapons of the Sultan's army against him in 1908. The Armenian movement is conspicuous by its absence in this second wave. It seems that the massacre of 1894-1896 had taken its toll on the Armenians of Turkey. The sole remarkable Armenian action of this period worth mentioning is a spectacular attempted assassination of Abdulhamid II by Dashnak militants in 1905. The bomb they planted went off with a delay and Abdulhamid came out unscathed.

Let us remind the reader of the experience of the Ulyanov family, the family of

24 Then there is a wave of rebellions between 1860 and 1862. During this interval, there was a revolt on the part of the Maronites of Lebanon, who won as a result a special status thanks to the intervention of Napoléon III, the dictator of France. To this was added the rebellion of the Armenians of Zeytun in 1861-1862. Moreover, in the same period, there was a very tense situation in Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Balkans. We tend to think that this early wave should be considered the revolt of the minorities and that the conditions of bourgeois revolutionary insurrections had not yet gathered.

Vladimir Ilitch Lenin in his youth, when his elder brother, a Narodnik militant, failed to kill the Czar during an attempted assassination and himself lost his life in retribution. The reader is asked to remember our assessment of the Armenian revolutionary movement as very much influenced by the Russian Narodnik movement.

There is another aspect to this episode. Should such an attempt at assassination occur today, there would be an entire chorus of critics across the entire bourgeois political spectrum, competing with each other in condemning the would-be assassin. However, Tevfik Fikret, the most advanced poet of bourgeois revolutionary sensibility in Turkish history and a trenchant critic of the despotism of Abdulhamid II, wrote a poem addressing the would-be assassin as “you, glorious hunter” and mourned the fact that the “hunter” was not able to shoot down his victim. This is startling testimony to the powerful hegemony of the revolutionary atmosphere that roamed the country at that moment.

This empathy between the different actors of the revolutionary upsurge found its counterpart in the holding of party congresses in common between the revolutionaries of the different nationalities (most strikingly between the CUP and the Armenian parties), who would be converted into the executioner and the victim in the space of less than a decade. Such are the contradictions of the “Freedom Revolution”.

Considered in its totality, the situation created by the 1908 revolution is one of an explosion of freedom. Numerous parties, associations, newspapers, and magazines are born. As already mentioned, a strike wave erupted, the like of which was only to be seen in the 1960s. People filled the streets of even small Anatolian and Balkans towns chanting “Hürriyet! Hürriyet!” (“Freedom! Freedom!”). In December Parliament, which had been shut down three decades ago, is convened. An air of freedom roams the country from one end to the other. The new regime is multinational in all dimensions. The imam, the priest, and the rabbi all take their place in the midst and often in the forefront of the crowds celebrating the victory of the revolution as representatives of the “millets”. Guerrillas imprisoned are immediately released.

In this context, the composition of the first parliament that was elected after the revolution has special significance. Of the new Members of Parliament, 142 are Turks (Kurds were, at that time, thus designated as well, no breakdown was made in the literature between the two), but there were also 60 Arabs, 25 Albanians, 23 Greeks (denominated “Rum” after “Eastern Rome” and not “Yunan”, the term used for the Greeks of Greece), 12 Armenians, 5 Jews, 3 Serbs, and one Vlach. In other words, 142 Turks and 133 non-Turks. The status of Armenian MPs has a special importance from the point of view of the topic of this article.

A complete alliance was established between the CUP, on the one hand, and the Hunchak and the Dashnak, on the other, thanks to the rapprochement embodied in the earlier cooperation between the two sides, given organisational form in the commonly held congresses of 1902 and 1907. Thus, the Armenian MPs were elected on the CUP slate. And if one remembers the character of the Armenian revolutionary movement, among them were socialists. This is how a right-wing author depicts the situation:

The first socialists under the Ottoman Empire were Armenian politicians. One of the two parties that were founded in the Abdulhamid epoch outside the frontiers of the country was socialist, moreover socialist in the Marxist sense of the word. These men, who sought the road to Armenian independence in the light of the ideal of socialism, were in close contact with the opponents of the Czarist regime, all of them Marxists—the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks—and had turned to socialism under their influence. In the first Constitutional parliament there were also, apart from the Armenian Members of Parliament, socialists, red socialists, among the Bulgarians that were elected on the slate of the “Committee of Union and Progress” and sent to Istanbul... Vlahof, the Bulgarian Member of Parliament from Salonica, was a “real socialist”.²⁵

This is quite damning for the unilinear view spread by left-wing liberals about the CUP and the revolution of 1908. They represent the CUP as the tyrannical defender of “Turkism” and yet among their Members of Parliament are Armenians and Bulgarians who are socialists, “red socialists” as this conservative author stresses.

Until the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, the CUP saw Turkey’s future in the form of a modern democracy that would be constructed together with the other “elements” (“millets” and other ethnicities) of Ottoman society. This is known as the programme of “Ottomanism”. That is the real programme of the Young Turks and of the 1908 revolution. This is diametrically opposed to the orientation of the Abdulhamid regime, based as it was on the repression or even extermination of the Armenians.

It is within this context that the 1909 Adana massacre of Armenians, mentioned earlier, should be reassessed. Adana, a major hub in the southeast of Anatolia, was a city that had avoided the 1894-1896 atrocities thanks to the popular uprising of the Armenian population living in the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city. In 1909, there occurred a massacre in this city quite similar to those that happened under Abdulhamid elsewhere, killing approximately 10 thousand Armenians according to some estimates. Some interpret this massacre as evidence that proves the fact that the Young Turks were enemies of the Armenians almost “congenitally”. However, as even genocide scholars like Vahakn Dadrian admit, Adana was a massacre that was planned so as to upset Young Turk revolutionary power. We have not come across any historical record of those responsible for the murdering of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in the 1894-1896 atrocities. Immediately after the Adana massacre, in contrast, more than a hundred people deemed to be the perpetrators of the killings were tried and executed.²⁶ It is a fact that in the wake of the Great War some ringleaders of the genocide were condemned to death by an extraordinary court. But, on the one hand, the scale of the massacre was so great as to make it impossible to cover up the crimes committed and, on the other, the political rivals of the CUP were after political vengeance, and even further (and this is the most important aspect), Istanbul was, then, under the rule of imperialist occupation

²⁵ Tevetoğlu, op. cit., p. 35, citing Münir S. Çapanoğlu’s book *Türkiye’de Sosyalizm Hareketleri ve Sosyalist Hilmi*.

²⁶ Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide. Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995, pp. 179-184.

forces, who set the pace and direction of the policy to be pursued. It is true that in the case of the Adana proceedings, too, appeasing the Great Powers might have been, and probably was, one of the motives, but this general context of the policy, a constant of Turkey's relations with Western Europe in the modern period, and the circumstances of imperialist military occupation cannot be put on a par.

In short, the Freedom Revolution of 1908 is of a character totally different from, and in certain senses diametrically opposed to, the caricatured version that is put forward at present by the left liberals. There is an aspect of this in the domain of foreign policy. In this first phase of the revolution, the Ottoman state moved away from Germany under Wilhelm II, which had remained entirely silent with regard to the massacres of Abdulhamid II. It started to pursue a policy close to Britain. This entire orientation will suffer a great blow with the onset of the Balkan wars. The Balkan wars created a fear in the *millet-i hâkime* (dominant nation) of the Ottoman lands to the effect that the empire and even the very existence of the state itself came under threat of extinction.

This dealt a mortal blow to the project of marching into the future relying on all the ethnic elements of Ottoman society. It resulted in the Young Turk leadership abandoning the programme of construction of a multinational Ottoman state and adopting a reactionary chauvinistic Turkish nationalism. This is much more important than the fact that the Ottoman state lost an important chunk of its territory in the process. It is a turning point for the CUP and for the relations of the Turkish dominant nation with the rest of the multitude of nations within the empire.

The Balkan wars implied a retrocession of the 1908 revolution, its becoming much more conservative in its orientation and the destruction of its multinational character.

Having started in October 1912, the Balkan wars cast the Ottoman state, a Balkan state *par excellence* for long centuries, out of the peninsula (even losing Edirne/Adrianopolis, which was later retrieved) within the space of nine months. The trauma created thereby for the CUP set in motion a profound transformation within the party. The CUP had been ousted through a coup of another organisation in July 1912, before the onset of the war, but came back in the midst of that same war as a result of the notorious raid on Bâbüali (the Sublime Porte, the seat of government) establishing a new government of their own with guns in their hands.

The entire atmosphere of revolutionary Turkey changed thereby. Two opposing coups within a span of six months, the CUP first ousted, then reconquering power. A nine-month war that ends in a debacle. No more echoes of the atmosphere of "freedom" so rampant in 1908 and no more traces of the free elections held on the heels of the revolution. Even worse is the abandoning of the idea of building a multinational state in favour of an orientation of unalloyed "Turkism". 1913 was the year of the inauguration of the policy of so-called "National Economy". This is the period when a *wholesale programme geared to promoting the Muslim (Turkish) elements of the bourgeoisie to a position superior to the non-Muslim elements (the Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and so-called "Levantine" wings) was applied.*

The idea that war is the continuation of politics by other means is at certain junctions true for domestic politics as well. Having started to promote the interests

of the Muslim fraction of the ruling classes at the cost of the non-Muslim ones before the Great War, the CUP resorted to military methods once the war started, especially in regard to the Armenians. The genocide, starting with the great deportation of 1915 and almost completely eliminating Armenian presence in Anatolia within the space of two years, is directly the result of this policy.

Having initiated a process of building a multinational bourgeois state using relatively democratic methods despite taking up questions pertaining to class only from the point of view of the interests of the bourgeoisie, the Freedom Revolution and its powerful leadership the CUP pursued a reactionary and merciless Turkish-nationalist policy from 1913 to 1918, when its leaders fled to Germany upon the defeat suffered in the Great War. The history of the Freedom Revolution and of the CUP is thus divided into two parts that stand in opposition to each other. In between rises the Balkan war.

The CUP did not lose its bourgeois character in 1913. It is still striving to construct a bourgeois state and develop capitalism on Ottoman territory. In other words, the CUP has not gone to the side of counter-revolution. It has remained on the ground created by the revolution, but has become rigidified and tyrannical. It is still working towards the aims of the revolution but is using reactionary methods to achieve those aims. In political history this has been called a “Thermidor”, a term inspired first by developments during the Great French Revolution. Continuing to work for the aims of the revolution in content, but becoming reactionary in method. The Balkan war was the Thermidor of the Young Turks.

6. Ottoman imperialism

*They shot me inside Çanakkale,
They laid me in a grave all alive.
From a popular folk song*

If the first condition for understanding the Armenian genocide is to grasp the Thermidor that befell the 1908 revolution, the second condition is to be able to correctly situate the Ottoman state’s position within the Great War. There is a one-to-one, inseparable, organic one would say, relationship between the policy of the CUP in the Great War and the Armenian genocide.

The thinking one finds in the intellectual systems of the Turkish bourgeoisie and of bourgeois socialism has generated a grotesque contradiction. The two wings of both the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois socialism, i.e. Kemalism and liberalism, find themselves in a strange consensus here.

The fact that the Ottoman state became a party to the Great War is lambasted as an adventure initiated by Enver personally or the CUP at large. The defeat suffered in the battle of Sarikamış vis-à-vis the Russian army is condemned in the severest terms. But then the Dardanelles/Gallipoli or “Çanak” war, itself but a battle within a long and bloody war, is elated, declared to be defence of the fatherland, and turned into a national cause. (Let us make a parenthetical remark here by pointing out that we have never encountered a distinctive approach on the part of the liberals towards the Dardanelles affair. We can safely assume that they adopt a neutral

position on this score.) The exaltation with respect to the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign is even more marked on the left. According to many prominent writers in this tradition, the victory of the Ottomans against the Allies at Dardanelles implies a progressive leap forward not only domestically, but equally internationally since it has rendered the October revolution in Russia possible.

It is interesting that historical development has brought together in this case the two wings of ideology, i.e. the Kemalist and liberal wings. This is for very different reasons, though, both with respect to their explanations of the country's joining the war and the assessment of the position of the country in the Great War. Kemalism very meticulously distinguishes itself from the CUP precisely on the question of the bankruptcy of the latter in the Great War. During the so-called National Struggle (1918-1923), Mustafa Kemal tried with all his might to keep Enver and his men, waiting in the wings eagerly for a false step on his part so as to grab power, away from the movement in Ankara.

Hence impossible for Kemalists to condone the policy pursued during the Great War. In effect, since the programme Enver strove for was to achieve the survival of the empire while Mustafa Kemal's programme after the defeat in the Great War was one of retrenchment to the heart of Anatolia, it was inescapable that the two projects clash at a certain point. For this reason, Kemalism characterises the entry of Enver into the Great War and his policy therein as "adventurism". This is reflected even in school textbooks.

Turning to liberalism and left-wing liberalism, this current lays the burden of what it conceives as the repressive approach of the state vis-à-vis civil society as the first sin of the CUP leaders. It takes an antagonistic stand against the CUP both in its revolutionary (1908-1913) and in its Thermidorean periods. This is what also determines its attitude concerning the position of the Ottoman state in the Great War (we have already noted that the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign stands aside here as a partial exception).

The fact that both liberals on the left and right and the Kemalists lay the responsibility of the participation in the Great War at the door of the CUP and Enver, its leader, due to their antagonistic feelings against the latter is an idealist interpretation of history. It conceals the real relations rather than explaining them. Hence, we must first take up the question of the real dynamic that pushed the Ottoman state to take the side of Wilhelmine Germany and the Axis at large in the Great War.

In fact, in the approach to the Great War, we find a new avatar of the idealist methodology that is used for other phases of Turkish history as well. In this methodology, history is shaped not by class struggles, but by the dynamic of the ideas and sentiments of certain individuals. What is said about Enver or the Triumvirate consisting of Enver, Talat and Cemal, or the CUP at large after a certain stage may not be misplaced. However, these are the concrete forms adopted by contradictions that lie at a deeper level while looking for a solution in their process of becoming.

The participation of the Ottoman state in the Great War and its position within that war were directly a product of the contradictions and the struggles within the bosom of the rising bourgeoisie in the country. The contradiction that marked the last half

century, if not even from the Tanzimat period (1839 on) was a contradiction within the bosom of that class: The rising commercial bourgeoisie in the Ottoman country consisted to a great extent of the Christian and Jewish elements. State power, on the other hand, lay in the hands of the Muslim Turks. The 1908 Freedom Revolution was the last move in unity of the rising bourgeoisie and the educated layers that sided with it. By eliminating in traumatic violence all the hopes of the CUP leadership to hold the “elements” together, the Balkan war (1912-1913) tolled the last hour of Ottomanism. Now the CUP turned to a future for the Ottoman state under the exclusive domination of the Turk and the Muslim and adopted a programme that excluded the Armenian and the Greek. (The Jews sided with the Turkish element, for a host of reasons we need not go into.)

This new orientation towards the non-Muslim “elements”, who in fact still held the greater part of economic power in their hands, aimed at turning over domination in the sphere of capital accumulation to the nascent Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie through the instrument of state power. This meant that the two currents of Turkism and Islamism were, separately or in combined fashion, going to form the basis of the new orientation. What the CUP sought to achieve during the Great War is this new programme of the Muslim Turkish bourgeoisie.

Neither Turkism nor Islamism were the brainchildren of Enver. Within the new rising fraction of the Turkish ruling classes all the layers, the local notables (*eşraf*), the nascent bourgeoisie, and the educated layers which served the class as their battering ram acted together. Ziya Gökalp, Yusuf Akçura, Gaspıralı İsmail, Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Ömer Seyfettin, Mehmet Emin, all the ideologues contributed to the new constellation. These are the Turkists. Islamism, on the other hand, was represented by the magazine *Sırât-ı Müstakim* under Abdulhamid II and by another magazine, *Sebilürreşad*, under the CUP. There was no Great Wall of China between the two environments.

The participation of the Ottoman state in the Great War was a *fuite en avant* as the French say, an escape towards the future. The “sick man of Europe” was painfully aware that all the Great Powers, i.e. the imperialist countries, were conducting negotiations and waging struggles in order to share out its heritage. The central bank, the public finance, and finally the army of the Ottoman state (and we will shortly come back to this) had been taken over by imperialist powers and the Ottoman state had fallen to the position of a semi-colony (a country that is formally, in other words legally, independent but is in fact beholden to foreign powers. As the dark clouds of war gathered in the horizon, the CUP resolved to remove the Gordian knot by a veritable *fuite en avant*: the solution would be **new conquests**! Turkism turned into the higher form of Panturkism (or the dream of the “Turan”) and Islamism the form of Panislamism. To respond to the collapse with new growth, that was the formula! Did Russia threaten Turkey by abusing the rightful grievances of Christian peoples? Then Turkey would respond in kind and raising the Turkic and Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia in rebellion would injure Russia at its Achilles’ heel! In other words, Enver’s programme was to expand towards both Russia’s hinterland and conquer Iran, Afghanistan, and beyond. The use of both Turanism (Panturkism) and Panislamism (since the Ottoman Sultan also claimed to be the Khalif of all

Muslims) was on the order of the day. So, from a defensive posture, the Ottoman state would now move to defend itself through an expansionary policy.

Adventurist this policy was. But it was a product neither of the sickly imagination of Enver, nor of the unwarranted militarism of the CUP. Adventurism is one thing, daydreaming is another. This strategic orientation did have a material basis. This material basis derived from the contradictions that Germany, the rising imperialist power of Europe, harboured, on the one hand, with Britain, the hegemonic power of imperialism now in decline, and, on the other, with Russia, which, despite its ambitions on the Ottoman Empire, had fallen prey to an as yet undiagnosed disease.

Germany wished to grab the colonies of Britain in Asia. As a result of this ambition the Ottoman Empire had become, even before the rule of the CUP, even during the reign of Abdulhamid II, a country on which Germany set eyes. This did not derive solely from the economic advantages the vast empire could offer Germany (for instance the Baghdad railway). The Khalif-Sultan of the Ottoman state was a well-placed ally in order to disrupt the domination of Britain over vast areas of Asia, from India to Egypt. Additionally, the empire under the control of the Turk was the ideal partner in order to entice the Turkic peoples of the Caucasus and of Central Asia and beat Russia on its own turf. Germany and the Ottomans seemed to be born partners in this early age of imperialism. What Enver and his team did was to draw the conclusions of this situation and engage in *cutting the Gordian knot of the Ottoman Empire with Wilhelm II's sword*.

Let us then draw a plain conclusion: the Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie of the Ottoman state had been hopelessly searching for a way out both in its rivalry with the non-Muslim fractions of the bourgeoisie and in the face of the ambitions of imperialist countries to fragment and gobble up the empire. This bourgeoisie, resting as it was on a weak economic basis, had only one lever: this was the powerful state apparatus that inherited a tradition of six centuries although it seemed to have reached the end of its days. The Great War became the trampoline that was expected to help the Turkish rulers of this state to overcome the threat of fragmentation through recourse to a risky policy of further expansion in other directions at this moment of the repartition of the world by the Great Powers.

If what has been said so far is true, the rest follows logically. Since the Ottoman leadership strove to become a part of the entire attempt at the repartition of the world, then the war waged by the Ottomans becomes *an imperialist war* just as the war is an imperialist war for the other powers! Tremendous irony: a precapitalist colonialist empire that has become a semi-colony itself of the truly imperialist countries is out to wage an imperialist war hand in hand with Wilhelmine Germany!

The Ottoman state is not waging a war of defence or fighting for the defence of the fatherland in World War One. It is participating in the war of repartition of the world hoping to benefit from the pillage of the losers.

If this characterisation of the objective situation of the Ottoman state in the Great War is correct, several conclusions to be drawn from this rip apart certain myths that are harboured in Turkish bourgeois ideology.

The only event of the war on which any ideological legend had not been created until recently was the Sarıkamış rout suffered against Russia on the mountains

in the northeast of the country. This is due to the hostility of both Kemalism and liberalism to Enver, who at that stage was the leading figure of the CUP. Almost every source insisted that the army sent to this battle was destroyed in a few days and that 90 thousand soldiers fell victim under the snow and cold of Sarikamış. If what is depicted as pure adventurism is tied to the *fuite en avant* of the Muslim-Turkish fraction of the Ottoman bourgeoisie when faced with the historic dead-end they faced, this characterisation is *grosso modo* correct. This was the state of things until recently. However, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union an effort to resuscitate Enverism or the CUP at large has been in the air, for reasons that we cannot go into here. This new tendency has engaged in a process of normalisation for Sarikamış, working for its historical rehabilitation. According to this narrative, Sarikamış should be seen as defence of the fatherland, a battle in which the “children of the fatherland” fell as martyrs, as much as those who died in the other battles the Ottomans engaged in during the Great War. No one would object to honouring the memory of extremely young people of the poorer strata of society who fell in that war. However, an approach that would hide from the view of the younger generations the fact that these “young children” fell victim to the instinct of pillage on the part of the ruling classes, which would cast a heroic light on Sarikamış, presenting the tragedy suffered as a catastrophe common to the entire “nation” should be categorically rejected. ***The Sarikamış battle lacks all credibility and legitimacy.***

We then come to Dardanelles. The spring months of 2025 will see the 110th anniversary not only of the Armenian genocide, but that of the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign as well. With Dardanelles/Gallipoli we enter the domain of legend. Seeing and presenting this war as the “defence of the fatherland” and as a harbinger of the National Struggle of 1918-1923 in the aftermath of the Great War is an approach that is almost universally adopted. This fact of universal acceptance does not in any way make this view any less misconceived! If it is true that the war effort of the Ottoman state within the Great War *in toto* has an imperialist character, the different stages, episodes or battles of this imperialistic war cannot be assessed in abstraction from this general characterisation. The Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign is a defensive episode of a total war that is waged for imperialist ambitions. That is all. If the war carries an expansionist, predatory, imperialistic character, one of its episodes cannot be “defence of the fatherland”!

The mystique created around the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign is so all-encompassing that many people believe that Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who displayed a very successful military performance in this campaign, was the commander of this campaign. This is far removed from the truth. At that stage Mustafa Kemal was an officer at the level of colonel and had no authority apart from being the commander of a military unit among others. ***The commander of the army in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign*** was, for a long stretch, Liman von Sanders, whose overall title was ***Inspector General of the Ottoman army***. Yes, *von Sanders*, a typical German aristocratic name! *von Sanders* was an officer of the German imperial army, just like *von Bronsart*, the ***Chief of Staff of the Ottoman army***, or *von Kress*, the ***Councillor of Enver Pasha at the Headquarters***, or, *Falkenheim*,

the *head of the so-called Blitzkrieg Armies*, or Souchon, the *Commander of the Navy*. The Inspector General, the Chief of Staff, the General Staff Officer, the army commander, the navy commander, these are all German, but the victory is national! The Turkish people must put an end to this self-mockery! The Ottoman state had, in a certain sense, become an extension of the German state during the Great War. The common objective of both (and of the Habsburg Empire, their partner) was to capture the colonies of other imperialist countries and pillage the wealth of those countries as a result of the repartition. This was, by its very name, repartition on a *world scale*. One cannot hence attribute a national defence character to individual battles or campaigns.

To claim that, by repelling the Allied armies, the victory of the Ottomans in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign made the October revolution possible and to boast for this achievement is sickly behaviour. Even if it were true that such a victory of the Ottomans isolated Russia from its allies and thus left it frail and bloodless and, further, that this led to the workers and peasants to rise up and accomplish a revolution, this is by no means testimony to the progressive nature of the Dardanelles/Gallipoli war. Even many a negatively assessed, even detestable events in history have created an environment amenable to positively assessed events, which fact is simply a result of the dialectical character of change in society. By following the logic advanced with regard to the victory of the Ottomans in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli war, the real proximate cause of the October revolution, the participation of Czarist Russia in the Great War, would have to be seen in a positive light as well!

As for the campaigns in the Middle East that resulted in the secession of the Arabs from Ottoman rule, this much can be said: The Ottomans did not have any legitimate historic claim on those lands anyway. Those territories had been home to different Arab societies and states for long centuries. To characterise the conduct of the Arabs as a “stab in the back” or as “perfidy” is unacceptable.

This analysis of the position of the Ottomans within the Great War inevitably summons the question “what policy should socialists have adopted?” Since it is not only those who pursue a line that is a hybrid between Kemalism and socialism but also a majority of socialists who consider the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign a heroic “defence of the fatherland”, the answer by the majority of the left to this question is obvious. Under other circumstances, our approach would, without a shred of doubt, also have been the defence of a semi-colonial country against imperialist aggression. To cite a single example, when Italy attacked Tripoli (Libya) in 1911, which was an Ottoman possession, both the major spokespeople of international socialism and the socialists of the Ottoman lands stood by the Ottoman side and for the defeat of the Italian army.²⁷ This is the correct stance under those concrete conditions.

²⁷ The Italian Socialist Party, as well as Lenin, Trotsky and Kautsky sided with the Ottomans, qualifying the Italian initiative as “an instance of imperialist banditry” (see Savran, *Avrasya Savaşları*, op. cit., p. 53.) The Salonica Workers’ Federation, on its part, characterised this aggression as “brigandage undertaken by the Italian government, which has received the approval of the great powers of capitalist Europe in underhanded fashion” (see “Osmanlı Sosyalistlerinin Balkan Federasyonu Çağrısı”, *Gerçek*, October 2012).

However, the position of the Ottoman state within the Great War is different, as has already been explained. The Ottomans were out to fight for dividing up the world as much as the other Great Powers. It is obvious that under these circumstances the most correct policy should have been *revolutionary defeatism*! The fundamental task of Ottoman socialists, and in particular of Turkish socialists, in World War One should have been to fight for the defeat of the Ottomans. This is both the most effective policy against the sending of the workers and peasants to death for the sheer appetite for plunder of the emerging Turkish fraction of the bourgeoisie and the most correct policy for preparing the revolution. Moreover, on the basis of this policy Ottoman socialism will have contributed to the killing of two birds with one stone. It will have contributed to the defeat of imperialism, fighting the war as if the Ottoman state and army were an inseparable part and parcel of the German empire. This way Ottoman socialists would have found themselves on the same front as the heroic revolutionary Marxists of the German socialist movement, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

We have seen no sources on the position of Turkish socialists in the war (for instance that of the *Osmanlı Sosyalist Fırkası*-Ottoman Socialist Party). We will get back to the position of the Armenian socialists below. But it is obvious that the policy that we are defending *ex post factum* is diametrically opposite to the “patriotic defence of Çanakkale (Gallipoli)” line.

7. Genocide and primitive accumulation

Capital comes [into the world] dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

Karl Marx²⁸

The shortest section of this long article will, ironically, be on the Armenian genocide of 1915. As we indicated in our introductory remarks, for the purposes of this article the existence of a genocide is not a point of debate but a presupposition. The aim of the article is to explain an already existing genocide on the basis of the historical materialist method, within the framework of class struggles. What has been explained so far has really laid the stones that pave the road to genocide. Rather than narrate the events or count the casualties or engage in a debate on what is and what is not a genocide or try to determine whether it was a unilateral massacre or a mutual one, we will attempt to present in synthetic form all that has been said about what historical basis the genocide rises upon. In other words, we will summarise the political and socio-economic dynamics of this human catastrophe and crime against humanity.

The genocide that started with the mass deportation of the Armenians out of Anatolia had two interrelated objectives at two different levels. First, from the geostrategic point of view, or in other words from the point of view of the necessities of the administration of the state, the Armenian question had formed the Achilles’ heel of the Ottoman state vis-à-vis the European Concert of States. If the breakaway

²⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume I, New York: International Publishers, 1967, p. 760.

of the Balkan countries from the Ottomans (this is what the famous “Eastern Question” is, in the narrow sense) had created a traumatic impact, the Armenian question concerned a geography that lay at the very heart of the Ottoman state, that is to say Eastern Anatolia. If the principle of “from the sea to the sea”, dear to the heart of Armenian nationalism, were to be implemented, this would imply the breaking away from the country of a vast territory from Trabzon (Trebizond) to Çukurova (Cilicia). Moreover, the Muslim population inhabiting this territory was larger than the Armenians (or than the Greeks in the Black Sea region). In a certain sense this was a problem insoluble on bourgeois bases. Enver and Talat decided that the “final solution” to this problem was to put an end to Armenian presence in Anatolia. The genocide is a product of this “final solution”.

The second dimension of the question was more socio-economic than political and brought out the class basis of the question. This was an extreme method whereby the Muslim-Turkish fraction of the Ottoman lands endeavoured to destroy the superiority of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie and greatly speed up the primitive accumulation of capital by forcibly grabbing the property originally owned by the latter fraction and by the non-Muslim population at large.

The episodes of ethnic cleansing against Anatolian Greeks (the “Rum”) that occurred in the Aegean, Central Anatolia, and Black Sea (Pontus) regions during the extended war that lasted from 1911 to 1922, starting from the war of Tripoli, Libya, to the end of the National Struggle as well as the population exchange that was organised between Greece and Turkey are measures of ethnic cleansing that reinforce the impact of this genocide. “Thanks” to these the non-Muslim peoples became truly “minorities” after 1923, in the republican period, and then were gradually erased totally from Anatolian soil.

The first dimension was achieved through the destruction of the Armenians as a population. This need not take the form of murdering each and every single Armenian. The driving of Armenians from their historic homes of Western Armenia, (migration to Eastern Armenia or fleeing abroad to form a diaspora), their Islamisation, semi-forcibly marrying Armenian women to Turks or Kurds again involving their Islamisation, the Turkification of young Armenian children on a mass scale in orphanages etc. were all methods through which the Armenians were condemned to erasure from Anatolian soil. This is the classical definition of genocide!

This second aspect starts from the forcible deportation of Armenians from their home with Arab deserts as their final destination (the famous “Deportation” with a capital D) and is completed when they are exterminated or they or their inheritors are deprived of the possibility of returning to claim their property. This dimension was finalised by the passing of new legislation under the overall title of “Abandoned Property”.²⁹ (The appellation is indeed ironic, as if the Armenians *willingly* abandoned

29 The sources on this topic are increasing gradually. See Akçam/Kurt, op. cit.; Sait Çetinoğlu, “Diyarbakır’da Ermeni Mallarını Kim Aldı?” [Who Took the Armenians’ Property in Diyarbakır?], Paper presented to the Diyarbakır Conference, 2011; Aslı Çomu, “Çukurova Bölgesinde Mübaddillere Dağıtılan Ermeni Emlak-ı Metrukesi” [The Armenians’ Abandoned Property Distributed in Cilicia to Those Who Were Part of the Exchange], in Sait Çetinoğlu/Mahmut Konuk (eds.), *Öncesi*

their property behind them!) Not only socialist but all conscientious people must understand this fact: outside a few cities such as Istanbul and (partially) Izmir Armenians from all regions, from the Westernmost province to the Easternmost, all were driven from their home towns, their ancestral hearth, merely within the space of a year. Let us pursue the thinking of some of our so-called historians and even go so far as to assume that none of these people were killed, that they all fled wherever they could, be it Yerevan, Beirut, Damascus, Nicosia, Cairo, Paris, Marseilles, Los Angeles, Boston, or Buenos Aires. One fact will stubbornly pursue us everywhere we go: all the portable and immovable property of these people, their houses, their fields, their herds bovine or ovine, their beasts of burden, their poultry, their vineyards and gardens, their workshops, their stores, their factories and manufactories, and all other instruments of industrial production, their bank accounts, their receivables, everything they owned remained behind. It is as if the Armenian community under the Ottoman state were attacked and robbed by bandits in the dark of the night. ***This entire community was dispossessed, in other words, of their belongings. Their entire wealth, however modest, was expropriated in the distinct Marxist sense of the term.*** The so-called *Emval-i Metruke* legislation is but the legal smokescreen for this dispossession/expropriation.

To decide what proportion of those whose means of production were taken away from them were capitalists, what proportion traditional landowners and what proportion petty-bourgeois and to determine what proportion of those who were stripped of their durable means of consumption, i.e. their houses, furniture, fixtures, clothes, means of transportation, animals etc. were proletarian or semi-proletarian is a detail not possible to discover not only by people like us who are not historians, but in all probability by professional historians as well, since all the documents are kept away from the public eye. (Even if there were documents still kept intact and even if these were brought to light and permission were given to historians to thoroughly examine them, one can imagine what a formidable task it would be to make an inventory of the belongings and possessions of an entire people counted in the millions.) Let us only point out several conclusions that can be drawn from this incontestable fact of dispossession.

1) The process of expropriation that was experienced in 1915 has certain dimensions that correspond to those of a process of primitive accumulation. The dimension that is most extensive is the forcible separation of the Ottoman Armenian peasant from his farm and field and the Armenian artisan and small merchant from his workshop or his store with ***a part*** of these means of production being appropriated by the Muslim ruling classes and, to the extent that capitalist relations have developed and are further developing in the country, becoming capital in their hands. This is a typical case of primitive accumulation: at one pole, the direct producer becoming a proletarian; at the other, the means of production becoming capital.

2) We say “a part” because all data show that a part of the property of the

ve Sonrası ile 1915. İnkâr ve Yüzleşme [1915 Before and After, Denial and Confrontation], Ankara: Ütopya Yayınevi, 2013, p. 103-109; Nevzat Onaran, “Ohanneslerin Tarlası ‘Kimin’?” [To ‘Whom’ Does the Field of Ohannes Belong?], *ibid*, pp. 110-163; Mehmet Polatel, “İttihat Terakki’den Kemalizm’e Ermeni Malları”, [Armenian Property from the CUP to Kemalism], *ibid*, pp. 164-211.

Armenians was turned over to Muslim migrants of different nationalities fleeing repression in the Balkans and the Caucasus. If the land, built structure, farmland, means of production as a whole is not sufficient to produce more than what the family can produce with its own labour, this implies that in the new situation as well the ranks of the rural or urban petty-bourgeoisie will grow. Thus, the nationality and the religious affiliation of the small producers will have changed but the class relation remains constant. This cannot be characterised as primitive accumulation. There may even be situations in which the means of production of an Armenian large farmer or factory owner may be shared out among a multitude of migrants in which case the wealth will not be centralised (as it should have been if this were primitive accumulation), but, on the contrary, dispersed among many. This may act partially as a land reform. Hence, it is important to determine, although this is very difficult to do in practice, what proportion of the Armenians' property left behind is distributed in the form of small property and what proportion is turned over to the ruling classes or potential bourgeois (for instance to officers and civil servants who were partisans of the CUP).

3) The classical form of primitive accumulation resolves itself into the processes of the dispossession of the direct producer and the conversion of the means of production (in particular of the land and built structures on it) the direct producer is thus separated from into capital. However, Marx also mentions the plunder conducted by the nascent bourgeoisie (at the time of his writing on the subject almost exclusively the bourgeoisie of the Western European countries) all around the globe. Even if the previous owners of the of the means of production or circulation are not direct producers, those means of production that are forcibly grabbed or appropriated by hook and crook may be considered to be a part of the process of primitive accumulation. In this sense, all the property grabbed by the Muslim ruling classes from Armenian merchants and productive capitalists are an aspect of primitive accumulation. The genocide manifested itself as an aspect of struggle *between* classes (see paragraph 1 above) while here it is again class struggle, but a struggle *within* the same class, a struggle between the different fractions of the same class.

4) There is an intriguing side effect of the genocide in the context of this last type of expropriation: in situations where elements of feudal or semi-feudal ruling classes appropriate the property of the Armenian merchant or productive capitalist, the net result will be not one of progress but one of retrogression of capitalist development on Anatolian territory. Social wealth that used to be utilised as capital and contributed to capital accumulation is now being devoted to production of a feudal nature or directly to excessive consumption. If that is the case, it is important, from the point of view of class analysis, to calculate in what proportions the so-called *emval-i metruke* was distributed or grabbed by the different classes and layers of the Muslim population, even though we have already determined that such calculation is quite difficult to accomplish at this stage of history.

5) Alongside the question of the proportions in which the *emval-i metruke* was distributed among the different classes, it is important to find out also which classes within the Armenian "*millet*" were massacred and/or dispossessed in what

proportions. There can be no doubting that, with certain exceptional regions, Armenians from all parts of Anatolia were uprooted from their ancestral homes and deported. But certain fine details are important. *From the point of view of the massacre*, it is *a priori* a higher probability for upper-class Armenians to have bribed their way out of the typical routes of deportation or used other methods (social influence, personal friendly relations with the right Muslim notables etc.) to avoid this and instead taken refuge in some corner of the world in a planned manner. The Istanbul Armenians, on the other hand, are an entire category of their own. If we leave aside the politically active Armenians and the intellectuals that were apprehended during the detentions of 24 April 1915 and immediately before and after that fateful date, most of whom were assassinated at a certain point, it would be interesting to research into the extent to which the amira and the bourgeoisie of Istanbul were spared for class reasons. This cannot be dismissed by saying that Istanbul was much more susceptible to the scrutiny of the rest of the world. There were consulates of European countries in many cities of Anatolia and the missionaries were active observing every move of the Ottoman state even in the remote backwaters of the countryside where there were sizable Armenian populations living. Here again the devil is in the details. If one is to believe the official documents of the government, during the period of the armistice tens or even hundreds of thousands of Armenians returned to the country.³⁰ One is permitted to assume that they were not planning to go on living as before in a country where their nation had been decimated, but were back for the liquidation of their assets, striving to save whatever they could and go settle in whatever corner of the world they could migrate to. Here is the question: what is the class composition of this group of people? For deeper reflection on the matter would suggest that the cost of the return trip and the advantages of bribing or social prestige and influence and the mere fact of the expectation from this trip showing that there is a lot to lose should the person not come back—all of this suggests that the returnees were very heavily skewed towards the wealthier classes, i.e. the bourgeoisie and the richer layers of the petty-bourgeoisie, including the more modern wing of that class, the professionals etc. This means that before all this research has been carried out, it is impossible to definitively establish to what degree the genocide and the process of expropriation that accompanied it bears a perceptibly distinct class character.

6) Finally, the Syriacs and the Assyrians who were subjected to the same treatment as the Armenians during the war and the Greeks of Pontos to the extent that they were similarly treated and those who were later forced to settle in Greece on the basis of the official population Exchange of 1922-1923 should also be brought into the overall balance sheet.

8. The part played by German imperialism in the genocide

We saw above that during World War One the commanding staff of the Ottoman army was almost completely in the hands of German generals and admirals. There was even a rule that stipulated that whenever a Turkish officer was in the command

³⁰ Akçam/Kurt, op. cit.

echelon, the staff officer would be German. (The converse is also true. All German commanders had a Turkish staff officer.)³¹ Alongside the fact of the Ottoman army being under the command of the German general staff, Enver, the strongman of Turkey at that time, although sharing this power to an extent with Talat and Cemal, was working closely together with the men of Wilhelm II. Since this close alliance continued until the final days of the war and since the Armenian genocide did not create the least damage to this alliance, the question may very legitimately be posed of what the level of Germany's responsibility in the genocide was.

The mere fact of recalling Germany's responsibility in the genocide is met with a certain irritation in those circles that do not approach the genocide in an apologetic manner or are not oblivious to the genocide. We suppose the following is the reasoning behind that apprehension: To claim the complicity of Germany in the genocide may open the door to an alleviation of the Ottomans' guilt and may, over time, even lead to the laying of the entire responsibility on "imperialist plotting". This worry can be understood easily. But to overlook the silence of a country as important as Germany on the question of genocide for this reason is to make do with a very incomplete picture of that catastrophe.

There may also be certain others who wish to expose German responsibility for a much unhealthier reason. If the major responsibility in the genocide is to be attributed to a kind of "mentality" of Turkish rulers at a certain historical juncture, are we then going to accuse the Germans for a motive like "having a CUP mentality" as well? A different route may, of course, be taken by some: Wilhelm II might have collaborated with the Young Turks because of his "Prussian militarist mentality"! The worst is no doubt to avoid including Germany in the picture simply to attribute the genocide to the inherent evil that resides in the Turk's soul (even if the other nation happens to be the Germans who, in only a quarter of a century are going to commit the crime of the Holocaust)!

Let us repeat once more: this article is not an exercise in historiography. The existing literature is replete with evidence that proves that the high-level representatives of the German state in Turkey knew about the genocide in detail, but as a rule did not lift a finger.³² The widespread opinion is that Wilhelm II and the German government did not wish to pressure Turkey with such unimportant matters since the country was a great asset for Germany both against Britain and Russia. To our mind, there is not the place for the slightest shred of doubt that Germany is the accomplice of the genocide prepared and implemented wilfully by the CUP

³¹ Dadrian, *History*, op. cit., p. 251.

³² The most important source on this question is a book of documents compiled by Wolfgang Gust: *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. We were able to consult Gust in a very restricted manner. The Dadrian volume, *Ermeni Soykırımı Tarihi* has an entire chapter (Chapter 28) full of evidence on this aspect of the matter. (*History*, op. cit., pp. 248-301. Dadrian has also devoted an entire book to this topic: Vahakn N. Dadrian, *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide. A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity*, Watertown: Blue Crane Books, 1996. We have not had a chance to inspect this work. A recent publication in German seems to be of interest as well: Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord: Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier*, Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2015.

leadership. The real question in our opinion lies elsewhere, since the literature does not raise this point and even, we would venture to add, intentionally avoids it for ideological reasons. Our intuition tells us that Wilhelm II and the German war machine played an important part in the *planning* of the genocide. In other words, Germany is not solely a passive accomplice, but the genocide is possibly its brainchild. Lest there may be a misunderstanding, let us emphatically repeat that this is simply an intuition and explain wherein lies the logic for this intuitive idea.

To begin with, Wilhelmine Germany is the perpetrator of the first genocide of the 20th century, even before the Armenian genocide. When the Great War started, only a decade had passed by since the German state had wrought genocide on the Herrero and Nama peoples of what was then known as German Southwest Africa (and today is Namibia) and almost exterminated the 80 thousand-strong Herrero population through a deliberate policy of punishment and destruction.³³ It was not the notorious Prussian militarist tradition alone that lay behind this savagery, but the hunger for colonies of the industrial powerhouse Germany that had come late to the imperialist league, whereas Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and others had already divided up the world between them. This is the kind of leadership that led this new giant into the Great War, coalescing with the Ottoman Empire which, to its mind, held the keys to the entire continent of Asia. It would not be surprising to see Germany do the same for that invaluable ally. Not to forget that the same needs and a part of the cadre that had served on Ottoman soil during World War One, including the notorious Hitler supporter Fritz von Papen, would drag Germany, only a quarter of a century later, to the Holocaust and the full-scale massacre of the Roma. The Kaiser, to be brought down by the 1918 German revolution, was himself an advanced enemy of the Jews and would form a worldview akin to that of Hitler towards the end of his life.³⁴

Secondly, the sources that we have used on Wilhelmine Germany attest to the fact that the Kaiser held foreign policy tightly under his control, even saw it as his private turf, and used extremely secretive methods in this area.³⁵ On the other hand, historical record shows that there is an immensely close relationship between the Kaiser and Enver to a level that can simply not be taken as ordinary.³⁶ Our suspicion is that the Kaiser had turned Enver into a follower of his when the latter served as military attaché in Germany and became, at the beginning of, or even before, the war at least an accomplice of the genocide through his men taking part in the planning process.

33 Jeremy Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herrero: Kaiser Wilhelm II, His General, His Settlers, His Soldiers*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 2011.

34 John C. G. Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court. Wilhelm II and the Government of Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, s. 190-212.

35 In addition to the source cited in the previous footnote, see John C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II. Into the Abyss of War and Exile 1900-1941*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014 and Annika Mombauer/Wilhelm Deist (ed.), *The Kaiser. New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

36 Enver was on a mission twice in Germany before the war and became close to the Kaiser. There is evidence that Enver surreptitiously visited Germany and visited the Kaiser in spring and July 1914, and again in April 1917. See Dadrian, *History*, p. 290.

Even if we did not take things so far, in any case one of the factors that marked the Armenian genocide is that Germany entirely condoned and covered up the crimes of the Ottoman state. Thus, the genocide is also a product of the war of repartition in the early world war. In other words, it is a *result of class struggles within the imperialist bourgeoisie*.

We wish to terminate this section of the article by referring to Karl Liebknecht's attitude on this question. This comrade-in-arms of Rosa Luxemburg who stood up to the part played by Wilhelmine Germany in the imperialist war with the battle-cry "the real enemy is among us!" and who, while a vote was being taken on the floor of the German Reichstag on war credits in December 1914, cast the only "no" vote among the entire membership of that body, submitted to parliament a demand for a parliamentary investigation in January 1916: "Is the Imperial Chancellor aware that in the present war in the land of our ally the Turkish empire hundreds of thousands of Armenians have been exiled and massacred?" The Director of the Political Department of the German Foreign Ministry, Ferdinand Carol Baron von Stumm will reply to Liebknecht's question in the following words:

The Imperial Chancellor is aware that some time ago, the Sublime Porte, under the pressure of our enemies conspiring to provoke an insurgency, has evacuated the Armenian population in certain regions of the empire and has allocated them new regions to reside in. There is ongoing exchange of opinion between the German and Turkish governments as a result of the fact that these measures have caused certain echoes. No further details can be disclosed.

Liebknecht insisted on the matter by pointing out that Johannes Lepsius "talks about practically the annihilation of the Armenians".³⁷ The speaker of the house rang the bell, stopped Liebknecht's intervention and did not allow him to continue talking.³⁸

For Baron von Stumm to say that the Ottoman government had "allocated new regions for the Armenians to reside" is of course a masterpiece of black humour. The Baron is probably referring to the graves of the Armenians who died in the process. But even here there is a confession: the Baron admits that "these measures have caused certain echoes". As a result, the German and Turkish governments are exchanging ideas. We can easily surmise that the "exchange of ideas" concerned the question of how to cover up the unpalatable facts.

As can be seen, there is only one member of parliament in the majestic democratic parliament of the bourgeoisie who wishes to bring this abominable crime against humanity into daylight: A Marxist, a communist!

³⁷ Johannes Lepsius was a German writer and missionary who had already delved into the Armenian question in a book written before the genocide titled *Armenien und Europa: Eine Anklageschrift wider die 1896*, exposing the part played by the Great Powers during the Abdulhamid massacres. He later documented the genocide during the Great War in a report titled "Bericht übe die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in Der Türkei". This report is possibly what Liebknecht is referring to.

³⁸ Wolfgang Gust, *The Armenian Genocide*, op. cit., p. 92.

9. What political position toward the Armenian genocide?

We ask the reader to stop reading for a moment and ask himself or herself what to do when such a great crime against humanity is being committed. Imagine for a moment a similar situation arose in your own country. What is to be done?

Given the fact that wars and massacres became so commonplace in the 20th century, the answer might simply be to behave in the same manner as how one would behave in other comparable situations. The highest figure of casualties cited for 1915 is 1.5 million. In our own region of countries, there have occurred catastrophes that approach this figure. For instance, approximately one million people died in the Iraq-Iran war between 1980-1989. Or the number of people who lost their lives in Iraq after the US invasion is counted in the millions. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the Syrian civil war. And yet, the Armenian genocide or genocides at large differ from these terrible situations. For one thing, the victims are indiscriminately children, babies, the elderly, or women not under arms, or in other words, all sections of the non-combatant population. And, on the other hand, what is destroyed in genocides is not individuals that can be calculated on the basis of finger counting; it is an entire nation or people or nationality or race. Let us then ask once again: what was to be done and what was done?

Naturally, we are going to try to answer this question from the point of view of left-wing political movements. The first type of political movement we will take up will be socialists of the oppressor nation. (The Kurds have not, as of that point in history, yet displayed any type of indication of a socialistic political orientation.) We already pointed out above that a policy of revolutionary defeatism was the correct line for Turkish socialists. Some readers may have found this idea quite freakish or even repulsive. We then ask the following question: When the events of the genocide were so glaringly obvious and when it was clear that this was part of the grand strategy of the CUP leadership for the war, how could one even imagine a policy different from revolutionary defeatism? The Turkish socialist who refuses revolutionary defeatism in World War One is condemned to becoming the accomplice of Enver and Talat! The position of “Let me stand up against the killing or even the deportation of the Armenians, but let me pursue a defencist policy in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli war” displays a deep misunderstanding of politics.

What is more complex is the situation of Armenian socialists and revolutionaries. What should an Armenian revolutionary have done when confronted with the massacring and exile of the people he or she is part of? Before answering this question, it should be recalled that Armenians did rebuff the command of deportation and resist in a series of very limited pockets. Zeytun, strong with its experience of 1896 (see above) or Musa Dağ (Musa Mountain) in the province of Hatay are the most striking instances. The massacre created much less of an impact in these instances and in the case of Musa Dağ the population was saved thanks to the assistance of outside forces.³⁹ These exceptions summon us to pose the following question: Why did the entire Armenian people not resist when it was

³⁹ Franz Werfel, *Musa Dağ'da Kırk Gün* [Forty Days on Musa Mountain], Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2024.

almost clear as daylight that such a big catastrophe was coming? The answer to this question involves a great lesson, that is perhaps even generalisable: When a political line is established in an erroneous way at the very beginning, then it might become impossible to set it right after a certain point has passed. This is the lesson. In our concrete case, when the socio-cultural properties of the Ottoman Armenian community are taken into consideration (a very male-dominated community, even more than the surrounding Muslim population), it was not possible for the Armenian community to resist because fighting-age Armenians had already at the outset of the war been mobilised in the so-called “labour battalions”. These battalions were military units in the area of military engineering, in other words of fortifications, in which the Ottoman government isolated young Armenian men when it had decided that the Armenians were a security threat for the empire. The most important aspect of the labour battalions is the fact that the Armenian fighting-age male population was thus being *disarmed*.⁴⁰ Thus, this population was captive in a kind of prison-house when the deportation started! So, these captives were helpless in the face of the persecution suffered by their community and their families, their mothers and wives and children and the elderly and were themselves cruelly murdered on the roadside.

It would be naïve not to think that this whole situation had been conceived at a very early stage. Why, then, did the Armenian community fall for this? Because the Armenian parties on both sides of the Russo-Ottoman frontier declared, as soon as the war started, that they were going to pursue a policy of defence of the fatherland! Despite all the hue and cry raised today by Turkish nationalist historiography, it is a fact that the Armenian “millet” loyally served the Ottoman state in the early phase of the war until the deportation began! The cases of violent confrontation between the Armenians, on the one hand, and the Turks and the Kurds, on the other, were not due to insurgencies behind the frontline but to Armenian units that accompanied the Russian army.

This means that the Armenian parties took the decision to have, for instance in the Sarikamış battle, the Russian Armenian to serve under the command of the Czarist army and the Ottoman Armenian to serve under the command of the Ottoman army. Had the Ottoman Armenians had access to weapons, they would have been sent to kill each other! This was true to such an extent that it even brought brothers face to face on the battlefield. Karekin Pastirmadjian, a member of the Ottoman parliament for the Erzurum province, defected to the Russian side as the war was starting while his brother Vahan Pastirmadjian served in the Ottoman army. It has been determined in the historiography of the battle that the military units in which the two brothers respectively served did confront each other during the war!⁴¹

A political line of an unprecedented absurdity in the annals of nationalities that live on the two sides of a political frontier under the oppression of two different

40 There is an abundance of sources on the Labour Battalions. Basic information may be consulted in this article: Ayhan Aktar, “I. Dünya Savaşı’nda Osmanlı Ordusunda Ermeni Askerler” [“Armenian Soldiers in the Ottoman Army in the First World War”], *Tophumsal Tarih*, March 2015, pp. 30-38.

41 Ibid, p. 32.

oppressor nations! The only excuse imaginable would probably have been of the type “had we taken another line, we would have been considered to be traitors and therefore slaughtered”. One would have smiled painfully in the face of such an excuse, had the stakes at hand not been this tragic. It transpired that, under such conditions of imperialist rapaciousness, one did not need to be a traitor to be slaughtered *en masse*. To support the voracity of two decrepit empires share out the world in a feast of vultures!

Once the Armenian revolutionary movement adopted this inane, nay insane, policy, it would inescapably side with the mobilising of the young male population of the Armenian community, who, given the nature of the “labour battalions” would therefore be disarmed and become harmless for the Ottoman state. The error having been committed at the outset, no turning back! In politics, lack of clairvoyance leads to disaster even when the intentions are of the best kind!

It is inconceivable that by summer 1914, when the war began, the Armenian revolutionary movement should not have realised that the revolution of 1908 had now entered its Thermidorean phase and that the Young Turk government had now become dangerous. In effect, the 7th Congress of the Hunchak, meeting in Constanta (today in Romania) adopted the following resolution:

Taking into consideration the fact that the Committee of Union and Progress is striving to establish an aggressive Turkish socialism and that this is of a very *lethal* and harmful nature for the other political parties and in particular for the diverse minorities [“elements” in Ottoman parlance in the original], the Seventh General Assembly of Delegates of the [Social Democratic and Hunchakian Committee] resolves to prohibit its entire set of active organs from cooperation with the said party and not to shirk any labour and effort to fight against the said party in order to oust and destroy it.⁴²

To decide meekly to defend the fatherland in a world war under a government that you regard to be “lethal” for minority nationalities! To add insult to injury, it is this self-same government that, through an Imperial Edict of Sultan Mehmet Reşat, has declared this war to be the *Cihad-i Ekber* (Grand Djihad) and, basing itself on the fact that the Sultan is at the same time the Caliph of the entire Muslim world, therefore, a *Cihad-i Mukaddes* (a Holy Djihad). What would a *Cihad-i Mukaddes* imply for the Armenians?

Let us be very clear: for Enver, the Armenian people is a barrier in the way of the unification of the Ottoman Empire with the great Turkish and Muslim universe of the Caucasus and Central Asia, even extending to Afghanistan and India. Its extermination has come on the agenda for this reason. The fact that Armenian revolutionary parties were not able to conceive anything else than “defence of the fatherland” is testimony, if such were needed, to how great a mind is the inventor of the policy of revolutionary defeatism, Vladimir Ilitch Lenin!

The correct policy for the Armenian revolutionary movement at the outset of the war would have been to declare a dual revolutionary defeatism, to arm themselves

⁴² Tevetoğlu, op. cit., p. 53. Our emphasis.

immediately and to prepare the self-defence of this oppressed nation. That every other policy was indeed “lethal” has been proved by history.

To pose a question before concluding this section could provide a tip for us: What should Shaumian and his comrades, who were carrying out a Bolshevik organising drive in the Caucasus under the hardships created by Czarist repression, have done when confronted with the Armenian genocide? This group of revolutionaries, who were Lenin’s comrades-in-arms fighting together under Czarist rule, were naturally pursuing a policy of revolutionary defeatism, the Bolsheviks’ official policy. So far so good. But when the mass-scale killing of Ottoman Armenians began? There is no answer to this question because the Bolshevik Party refused to attribute a special importance to the Armenian national question even from the very beginning of the 20th century. It is too late now. All kinds of positions will prove too abstract and ineffective because Bolshevism has not tested the experience of organising within the Anatolian (Western Armenian) community of Armenians. We will return to this theme at the end of the article.

10. Socialism and nationalism in the Caucasus

In the manner of nationalist historiography that reads Ottoman history through the eyes of the Turk, a considerable part of those who study the historical unfolding of the Armenian genocide treat the question at hand exclusively focused on the events that occurred on Anatolian soil. And yet the question is an Armenian question. The Armenians do not live in Anatolia alone, which happens to be only Western Armenia, but also in the Caucasus, the historic land of Eastern Armenia, and not only there, but also the parts of the Caucasus where Armenians do not form the majority, but wield a remarkable impact on economic, political and cultural life (today’s Azerbaijan and Georgia), especially in the large cities such as Tbilisi and Baku. Moreover, when one remembers that the Armenians were considered by Enver as an obstacle in the way of bringing the Turkic and Muslim world under Turkish domination, a point that has already been explained, then it becomes pretty clear that the policy of genocide might have very well become a threat for the Armenians living in the Caucasus.

Moreover, as we know that many thousands of Armenians, if not hundreds of thousands, who managed to save themselves from being massacred sought exile in Eastern Armenia, there is also the question of the fate of the so-called “remnants of the sword”, as they are called by Turkish chauvinists (an ugly term that is halfway to confessing that the Armenians had been subjected to a wilful campaign of extermination!), that is to be decided. A whole army may be built from among the hundreds of thousands who were subjected to such horror and lost their next of kin and their property.

In other words, it cannot be overlooked as a possibility that even if the Armenians of the Caucasus did not bother to avenge the fate of their brethren, those of the Armenians of Anatolia who were able to flee the catastrophe may have sought a way to avenge the fate of their community. That means that the genocide mongers would be sufficiently motivated to carry out a full-scale massacre in Eastern Armenia as

well. There is an infernal logic that large-scale massacres like genocides beget. Once the genocide perpetrators start the process, they soon find that they have to go all the way to the end. For if you leave the “job” half-done, there is always the very plausible prospect of the attempt at vengeance on the part of the survivors. So, the enterprise that has originally been dictated by tyranny is necessary to complete under the spur of fear. We then need to pose the following question: what kind of policy was adopted by the Ottomans during and in the immediate aftermath of the Great War toward the Armenians of the Caucasus?

In this section where we will take up the relations between the Ottomans and the Armenians in the Caucasus, we will conduct an analysis in its bare outlines. If one reason for this is that this article is already of an extraordinary length, another is the necessity of going into a wide variety of spheres in order to familiarise the reader with the region. In these territories on which have coexisted from time immemorial many different peoples and (in more modern times) nationalities in unusually entwined geographic proximity, a development in one part immediately has an impact on others, which makes it necessary to go into many seemingly irrelevant details to have a full picture. That is why we will make do with an analysis that limits itself to the bare outlines of the question at hand.

There is a very simple reason why we start looking at Ottoman-Armenian relations in the Caucasus not from 1914 but from 1918 on. The Ottoman armies suffered a rout in the early phase of the war and retreated all the way to Sivas at the western tip of Eastern Anatolia, abandoning many localities of Eastern Anatolia to Russian occupation, let alone make a foray into the Caucasus. The Sarikamış disaster, discussed above, is a striking symbol of this rout. However, when the October revolution achieves victory in October/November 1917, the fate of the so-called “Eastern Front” in Ottoman parlance changes as everything else. After revolution has come to Russia, Russian armies disperse. The Southern Caucasus (“Transcaucasia” when viewed from the Russian side) is no longer Russian territory and many different regimes are established in different parts of that territory. This raises the aspirations of the Ottomans concerning the Eastern Front. The Ottoman armies throw themselves into the power vacuum created by the Russian revolution in the Caucasus.

The year 1918 is particularly significant in this sense. For the Caucasus will remain in this limbo only until October 1918 and the Ottoman army will naturally have to cease all activity in the Caucasus when the Mudros Armistice is signed with the Allies on 30 October 1918. So, in order to study the Caucasus problem as a continuation of the genocide, one needs to look at this period separately and then take up the new situation that arises with the Mudros Armistice in its own logic.

So let us proceed by establishing a periodisation. After the period opened up by the October revolution ended with the signing of the Mudros Armistice (a period of almost exactly one year), with the foundations of the Ankara movement in the second half of 1919 and the formation of the Turkish Grand National Assembly there in spring 1920, a new period of mobilisations began on the Eastern front. The development of the so-called Turkish “National Struggle”, seeking the eviction of imperialist armies and the Greek army from Anatolia, is treated in much more

detailed fashion regarding the Western front, but less so concerning the Eastern front. There may be several reasons for this. One is the fact that the struggle reached its outcome much earlier on the Eastern Front. The conflict that started in spring 1919 ended at the end of 1920, with the overall Bolshevisation of the Caucasus, with frontiers that were to remain valid established definitively at this stage. Another reason might be that at the head of the Turkish forces fighting on the Eastern front towered General Kâzım Karabekir, who was to become a political opponent of Mustafa Kemal after the foundation of the republic in 1923. One can understand why the Kemalist camp might wish to pass in silence the military and political feats of a powerful opposition figure. All this means that from our perspective, there are two periods to look at: the ten months in 1918 and the one and a half years in 1919-1920.

The earlier period is marked, from our point of view, by three developments. The first is that the Ottoman armies relaunch their assault. The second is that Britain started to penetrate the Caucasus as soon as the domination of the Russians (now under Soviet power) collapsed in Southern Caucasus (Transcaucasia to Western ears). And the third is a most important experience of the history of socialist revolutions, the Baku Commune.

During six months in the year 1918, from spring to fall, a Soviet government was established in Baku. This is the first of its kind in the Southern Caucasus. Because it was confined to a single city and could not bring under its power even the surroundings of Baku, let alone the rest of the Southern Caucasus, it displays significant similarities to the Paris Commune of half a century before it. In order to understand the nature of the Baku Commune, the reader has to assimilate fully a point that we tried to underline above. From the point of view of the distribution of nationalities, the Southern Caucasus has not yet been separated into three homogeneous geographic territories. There are no well-defined territories whose frontiers can be delimited easily that are called Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Most important of all, Tbilisi and Baku, which remain definitely outside Eastern Armenia and which are today respectively the capital cities of Georgia and Azerbaijan, are under deep Armenian sway, not in terms of the distribution of the population but in the economic, political, and cultural domains.

If we restrict our gaze to Baku, where the Commune we are trying to understand was established, both the bourgeoisie and at least the modern layers of the proletariat are predominantly Armenian. The peasantry and the poor neighbourhoods of Baku are, on the contrary, dominated by the Azeri population (interestingly called Muslims or Tatars in that period). The overriding characteristic of Baku in the early 20th century is its immense oil wealth. For this reason, it is not important only for Russia. The Ottomans had already set their eyes on Baku. In the power vacuum created by the October revolution, the petroleum reserves of Baku had also raised the appetite of British imperialism. In the extraction of this mineral wealth, coveted by all the powerful actors active in the region, the Armenian bourgeoisie played a part in collusion with foreign capital and those workers that could be considered to be skilled were exclusively Armenian. The existence of a working class embedded in the petroleum industry is, in fact, the reason for the fact that Baku was the first

geographic unit in the Southern Caucasus that attempted a transition to socialism.⁴³

It is impossible to take up the experience of the Baku Commune filled with rich lessons for socialists in its full import here.⁴⁴ It is incumbent on us to point out what forces were effective in the structure of the Soviet that embodied power and among the commissars (a position that resembles that of ministers in bourgeois governments) that fulfilled the function of the executive (or government) of the Soviet. Alongside the two parties (the Bolsheviks and the left Socialist Revolutionaries) that had joined hands in the first coalition government in revolutionary Russia, the Baku Commune also included the Dashnak as a coalition partner. The fact that the Dashnak, which, it is true, will eventually pass on to the side of counter-revolution, did join a Soviet regime at this stage, did proclaim allegiance to the Russian Soviet regime under the leadership of Lenin, is a telling refutation of the demeaning attitude adopted by supposedly leftist Turkish nationalists regarding this Armenian party. Before it passes on to the side of counter-revolution at the end of 1918, the Dashnak is a socialist party, albeit a party of petty-bourgeois (peasant) socialism.⁴⁵

Such is the political composition of the Baku Commune. The national composition, for its part, is dazzling. The Baku Commune brought together the Bolshevik and left-SR revolutionaries of Armenian, Georgian, and Azeri background, with the Dashnak commissars (who are naturally all Armenians). This experience is writ large in the annals of the history of communism as a symbol of the hope of the stepping of the revolution beyond the straitjacket posed by nationalism. At the head of this committee of commissars was Stepan Shaumian, close friend of Lenin, the leader of the Baku Commune.⁴⁶

There were many achievements of the Baku Commune in practice. But there is one question which played a part in its establishment and its collapse that offers a great lesson concerning the topic of this article. The Commune is a revolutionary laboratory. Although the conditions for the victory of the revolution in Russia matured in October (or November according to the new style calendar), in Baku the

43 The other candidate would be Tblissi, where an industrial proletariat was already relatively developed. However, for historical reasons Menshevism had always been stronger among the Georgians than Bolshevism.

44 An excellent study of the Baku Commune has been translated into Turkish. We have consulted this Turkish version, but are quoting the original here for the benefit of our international audience: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune. Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972. Additionally, E. H. Carr's *A History of Soviet Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, volume 1, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, pp. 343-354) may be consulted.

45 The entry for "Dashnaksutiun" in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, in its 1926 edition, presents the party as an organisation that reflects the "economic aspirations of the Armenian commercial bourgeoisie". This is wrong. It is very obviously done to denigrate the Dashnak in retribution for its passage to the side of counter-revolution after 1918. See Perinçek, op. cit., "Büyük Sovyet Ansiklopedisi'nin 1926 baskısında Taşnaksutyun maddesi" [The Dashnaksutiun entry in the 1926 Edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia], pp. 38-44.

46 To the best of our knowledge, there is only one source directly on Shaumian in Turkish: Makiç Vahami Arzumanyan, "*Kafkasların Lenin'i*" Stepan Şahumyan ["The Caucasian Lenin". Stepan Shaumian], tr. Armenak Çaparitz, İstanbul: Umut Yayıncılık, [n.d.]. Şaumian was among those in the Bolshevik Party who defended, together with Lenin, the taking of power in October 1917. In an article written in April 1917 he had recourse to the idea of "continuous revolution" (Suny, op. cit., p. 91), corresponding to Lenin's "uninterrupted revolution".

situation was ripe only in spring 1918. In this process of maturing, alongside a host of other factors, there is the recourse of the Azeri poor toilers engaging in radical action against conditions of hunger. The Azeri people have now entered a state of mind that would add strength to the revolution and is multiplying its actions. Despite this, in the process of the taking of power, in an armed conflict between Dashnak members and the Azeris, many Azeris were killed.⁴⁷ This resulted in the rallying of the Azeris around the Musavat Party and led to a limited support on the part of the Azeri community to Soviet power in Baku. Thus, there are Azeris in the Soviet and among the commissars, but the rank-and-file support they receive is weak relative to that of Musavat, a nationalist bourgeois party. The lack of penetration of the surrounding countryside by the Commune is itself due to the fact that the peasantry is predominantly Azeri.

Hence, this fabulous revolutionary experience bears within its genetic makeup a deep defect due to a breach created along national lines. The collapse of the Commune in the fall is almost exclusively the result of a development that was a consequence of the same breach, albeit somewhat different in its manifestation.

We now need to bring in the other two factors that we earlier said had marked the year 1918. In the situation in which the Czarist army dispersed as a result of the Russian revolution, the Ottoman army relaunched its assault, reconquering the regions of Eastern Anatolia earlier occupied by the Russians and marching at full speed on the Caucasus. The meaning of this for the Armenians was the occupation of Eastern Armenia also by the organisers of the genocide and the threat of all Armenians being put to the sword. To add insult to injury, the commander of the Ottoman military unit marching on the Caucasus was none other than Halil Pasha, the uncle of Enver! There is some evidence that the mission of Halil Pasha was indeed to extend the genocide committed on Anatolian soil to Eastern Armenia. Leaving aside other pieces of evidence let us dwell on the most striking one: In his memoir, Halil Pasha admits that he has murdered “approximately ... 300 thousand Armenians”. And in 1918 in discussion with an Armenian group, he talks of “the Armenian millet, of which I am striving to annihilate down to the last individual”!⁴⁸ Whether this is true or not, it is self-evident how the Armenians of the Caucasus, among which there are also the tens or hundreds of thousands of Armenians of survivors of the Anatolian butchery, will perceive the advance of the Ottoman army.

It is this advance that created a deep political cleavage within the Baku Commune. Many elements within the Commune, with the Dashnaks at their head, defended the idea of calling, in the face of the “Turkish threat”, for help from Britain, which, the reader may remember, is striving to penetrate the Caucasus as an actor. This implied taking refuge under the protection of the major counter-revolutionary force, Britain, as the high winds of the Bolshevik revolution were blowing throughout the entire region. In practice, this meant asking the Commune to turn its back on Soviet Russia. Consistent proletarian revolutionaries simply could not accept such a

⁴⁷ It is highly probable that some among the Dashnaks wishing to avenge the genocide in Anatolia played a key part in these events.

⁴⁸ Dadrian, *History*, op. cit., p. 353.

proposal at this historic moment. Shaumian and his comrades rejected the proposal. After a long internecine struggle, at a vote taken in an enlarged Soviet meeting, the partisans of British intervention won the day with a very slight margin. Shaumian and the commissars resigned from their posts and decided to leave the city. But as they were fleeing, they were captured by counter-revolutionary forces. All the historical evidence shows that the 26 commissars were executed with the approval of British agents on 20 September. This was only four months before the same fate descended on the leadership of the Communist Party of Turkey in January 1921. An irony of history full of lessons!

It should be added that the Dashnak strategy that aimed to bring the Baku Commune under British protection served no purpose. Britain did not prepare serious fortifications here. What brought the situation under control was the resigning of the Talat Pasha cabinet of the CUP approximately a fortnight after the murder of the commissars and the signing of the Mudros Armistice approximately one month after that incident. It was not British imperialism that saved the Armenians of the Caucasus (and those Anatolian Armenians that had taken refuge there), but the implosion of the Ottoman Empire and the admittance of its defeat in the Great War. In between, the victim was the socialism of the Dashnak, which permanently sided with imperialism after this turn. With the withdrawal of the Ottoman army, the defeat of the Baku Commune, and the British political support for the Dashnak coming together, an anti-Soviet independent Armenia was established led by the Dashnak. The latter was now set on a course through which it would become a fully-fledged counter-revolutionary party.

The second period we need to tackle is the war between the armies of the Ankara government of Mustafa Kemal and Armenia. We need not go into the details of this episode except to say that whatever is said in terms of accusations regarding either army, there is no historical evidence that the Kemalist side harboured the objective of continuing the genocidal policy of the CUP at this stage of the struggle. This struggle was terminated by the step-by-step Sovietisation of the entire Southern Caucasus in the course of 1920 and the drawing of frontiers between the new Soviet administration and the Ankara government on the basis of treaties signed in early 1921.

In order to be able to advance a judgment on the war on the Eastern front led by the Ankara government, one needs to turn to the developments in Anatolia and take up the developments in the same period.

11. The national question in Anatolia

Before we pass a judgment on the war in the Caucasus, we need to return to the soil on which the genocide was implemented, that is to say Anatolia, and take a closer look at the national question in the framework of the new situation born of the Great War and the genocide. There is no reason why this glance needs to constrain itself with the alternatives of the Sèvres and Lausanne Treaties, as is routinely done by the Kemalists and their bitter foes on the Islamic right, but also among the liberal left. Both Lausanne and Sèvres are extreme solutions that would,

in all probability, not have been implemented had the proletariat come to power in Anatolia. The factors that define the framework of the problem can be summarised in the following manner:

1) Although Sèvres represents some kind of advance relative to the Ottoman period with in its capacity of recognising that the Armenian and Kurdish peoples possess certain national rights on Anatolian soil, its overriding character is defined by the plundering of Ottoman territory by imperialist powers and their proxy forces.

2) The occupied regions and zones of influence accorded to the various imperialist powers and their proxies were a clear trampling upon of national rights.

3) The project for Greece taking control, through the support and even the incitement of British imperialism, of a vast expanse of territory in western Turkey meant a claim of ownership that was five centuries old and disregarded the facts of the present situation which was characterised by the reality that, almost in every region of Anatolia the Turks (or the Turks and the Kurds together) claimed a majority or at least a plurality, of the population. The heroic implementation of the policy of revolutionary defeatism by the Communist Party of Greece (the KKE) in its early period, before its Stalinist degeneration, is both a confirmation of the truth of this statement and a monument of pride for all proletarian internationalists.

Let us, then, draw a preliminary conclusion. When we draw an imaginary line that connects the cities of Samsun-Sivas-Antep-Hatay, in the entire region to its west the rights of the Turkish nation have been trampled upon by imperialism and its proxies. The Turks are now an oppressed nation vis-à-vis *not* the other nationalities of Anatolia but imperialism. Therefore, the policy of *revolutionary defeatism* that was advocated for the Great War should now be replaced by a policy of *defencism*. The proletarian forces of the country should fight in alliance with the patriotic forces against imperialism and its proxies. ***The struggle of the Ankara government is, in this sense, an entirely just cause and objectively bears an anti-imperialist character*** (which is very different from saying that the leadership of this struggle is also subjectively speaking anti-imperialist).

4) The Kurdish national question is a vast problem in its own right, but its character is very different from what it is today. All Kurds cannot be held responsible for the Armenian genocide, any more than all Turks can be held responsible. Nonetheless, it is a clear fact that the Kurdish tribes and the local notables of bigger Kurdish cities (in particular Diyarbakir) became partners in crime in pursuing a policy of extermination and dispossession of the Armenians, hoping to benefit from this by becoming the dominant nation in the region. It is also clear that the Kurdish nation was marching in the footsteps of these ruling classes and strata. In the period immediately after the Great War, the Kurds are not really scared of the oppressor nation the Turks but afraid that the Armenians will grow in power. In effect, the Sèvres Treaty stipulated the attribution of certain regions the Kurds regard as their own fatherland (for instance Van and its environs) to the new projected Armenia. To summarise, due to these two reasons, i.e. because of their responsibility in the Armenian genocide and the fear of a Greater Armenia, the Kurds joined their fate with the Turks, the oppressor nation of the Ottoman period. The Ankara government did everything it could to ensure that no breach appeared in this united front with

the Kurds. In other words, the Kurds, excepting a minority rebellion in Koçgiri, coalesced with the Ankara government on the basis of their own assessment.

However, there are two problems here: the first is the sudden reversal of the situation in 1925, with the atmosphere being one of increasing repression; and secondly comes the question of the remaining parts of Kurdistan (i.e. the parts of Kurdistan in today's Iran, Iraq and Syria). These are landmarks that provide hints as to where the real solution lies.

We can now draw a second preliminary conclusion: the population of the region of Kurdistan that is today within the frontiers of the Republic of Turkey participated in the war under the Ankara government on its own volition. Hence this war is valid also in those regions that may be called Southeast Anatolia, which were abandoned to French and British dominance, but which could be imagined as territory of a Kurdistan in the future.

5) Thus, the only controversial question turns out to be the territory of the state of Armenia stipulated by Sèvres. Here, the new situation created by the genocide is, legally speaking, an entirely invalid status quo. What we mean is this: in the post-genocide situation, no one is entitled to advance the argument: "well, there lives no one of Armenian background in Malatya (or in Sivas) (or perhaps just a few families) and, therefore, these regions belong rightfully to the Ottomans (or to the Turks)". On the contrary, if anything, the genocide should be used as further reason for discrimination of a positive kind for the Armenians. So, one should really look at the situation *before* the genocide. On that score, there are two features that may be deemed contradicting each other.

First, this region (and possibly certain regions that remain outside of the Armenian territory in the Sèvres Treaty, in other words, certain other regions of the *Vilayat-i Sitte*) is the historic Armenia. On the opposite side, there is the fact that the Armenians are a minority across the region, the Kurds and the Turks together forming the majority. At first sight, it seems that there are here two principles on national rights that seem to contradict each other. If historic claims are taken into consideration the whole region needs to be considered to belong to the Armenians. It cannot be said such claims are irrelevant. All other circumstances being equal, historical and cultural belonging may be relevant. But to draw from the premise that a region belonged historically to a people the conclusion that the region should belong automatically to the modern nation descending from that historic people opens a Pandora's box of erroneous and dangerous results. The most striking case is of course the Zionist thesis of Eretz Israel (the Promised Land) which bases its whole argument on ancient history. To give priority to historical arguments, in ignorance of the living population producing and making their living on that piece of the earth has never been a principle any Marxist has owned up. It is for this reason that, provided that it takes place under conditions of full freedom, a referendum has always been considered, despite all its limitations, to be the best and the most democratic method to decide what a region opts for in the self-determination of the territory in question. No one has witnessed churches and mosques, sepulchres and cemeteries vote in a referendum, not the dead!

One conclusion to be drawn from all this is the following: The struggle of the

population in the Eastern provinces of Anatolia to keep these provinces as part of the Ottoman or (after the republic came into being) Turkish state and to prevent the formation of an Armenia cannot be considered to be identical to genocide. The Great War is over. It is no longer meaningful to continue the policy of revolutionary defeatism.

We cannot look at the movement in Eastern Anatolia that tried to wage this struggle (a movement that was part and parcel, indeed lay at the origin, of the Ankara movement itself) as a totally just or totally unjust movement. The war between the Ankara movement and the independent Armenia established by the Dashnak between 1918 and 1920 is one in which the interests of two bourgeois nations clash, one led by the Ankara movement based on the more modern ruling classes in the west of the country and the feudal ruling classes of the Kurdish east, the other led by the formerly socialistic (in the peasant sense) Dashnak that turned into a counter-revolutionary party after 1918.

Viewed from the Turkish side, it cannot be said it is as serious a defence of the fatherland as what was at that time being done in the west of Turkey. When viewed from the Armenian side, it is a struggle that may be seen as just because it was being waged by the other half of the nation that had been subjected to genocide, but as unjust when it was a matter of relative population sizes. There is also a contradictory situation when one considers the war in its national and class aspects. Seen through the national point of view, the war seems more just for Armenians. But on the other hand, when viewed from a class perspective, we find the Armenian side being led by a government that is decidedly counter-revolutionary, while the Ankara government is a close ally of Soviet Russia. So, this is a very complex situation. The fact that it came to an end through the timely Sovietisation of the Southern Caucasus is one of the most felicitous events of this period full of massacres and disasters!

It might, nonetheless, be open to discussion whether the frontiers that came out of the negotiations were just or not. And not only the frontiers. It is debatable whether in the region that extends from the Eastern Anatolian plateau to Eastern Armenia in the Caucasus the national question should be solved on the basis of two (or if Azerbaijan is included) three nation states. To say that historical arguments should be taken into consideration only after the needs of the current-day generations alive is not necessarily to say that many places, among which the Ararat Mountain (of such historic symbolism for the Armenians) or the site of the historic city of Ani should be Turkish territory.

Let us assume for a moment that proletarian revolution is triumphant in this entire region. The most meaningful solution will be found through a thoughtful negotiation of all sides concerned (in this case at least two, the Armenians and the Turks) and at most four (bringing in the Azeris and the Kurds). We will return to these matters when we are discussing questions relating to programme and strategy below.

Before leaving behind this aspect of the matter, let us touch upon a final question of some importance. During the Armistice years (1918-1922), the Armenians who sought a solution to the question of their national rights in their support for the French occupation forces made a great mistake. It was totally legitimate for the Turkish population of those regions to stand up against French imperialism. The

fact that the Ankara movement also supported this resistance on the part of the people of the region is also meaningful. It is true that the Armenians are an injured people. It is also true that they are trying to retrieve their property. But to take shelter behind an occupying imperialist power in search of one's national rights is not justifiable. One cannot fight an injustice through the creation of an even greater injustice.

12. Questions of programme and strategy

Marxism does not theorise or research out of a motive of curiosity. Its aim is to change the world in the direction of the emancipation of labour and the oppressed. In this endeavour, it strives to discover the laws behind daily occurrences and to comprehend the essence behind phenomena. This knowledge makes it possible to develop predictions for the future. Programme and strategy rise on the ground laid by this entire process.

What we tried to do in this article was to analyse the Armenian genocide on historical materialist bases and understand it through the mutual positioning and struggle of classes. We were able to reach certain explanations and conclusions. Now it is time to provide a synthesis of all this from the angle of programme and strategy.

Let us first remind the reader that we have repeated as a leitmotif the policies adopted by our mentor the Bolshevik Party from the early 20th century on again and again. When we took up the historical formation of the Armenian revolutionary movement, we intimated that there was a problem with the Bolshevik policy on the Armenian question. We later tried to elaborate on this in the section on the political assessment of the genocide: Caucasian Bolshevism under the leadership of Shaumian did not show any interest in the Armenian national question even if from an explicitly non-nationalist perspective.

For this reason, when the Armenian genocide descended on Western Armenia, Shaumian and his comrades are helpless because organising among Anatolian Armenians has never come on their agenda. Later we explained that there was a weakness in the formation of the Baku Commune consisting of the distance the Azeri urban poor and peasants kept to the Armenians and Bolsheviks, that more importantly the collapse of the Commune was directly predicated on the vicissitudes of the Armenian question, that, confronted with the approach of the armies of Halil Pasha, the Dashnak abandoned the Soviet camp in favour of the British camp.

Proceeding from all this we can now ask the following question: Within the framework of the Bolshevik policy for the Caucasus, first, would it not have been better had the Armenian national question been taken more seriously? And, secondly, was it not a missing link in the Bolshevik policy not to have developed priorly a policy to deal with these national frictions, related as these were to the Armenian question as well.

Regarding the first point, we need to recall that when Bolshevism started its organising drive in the Caucasus, the 1894-1896 massacres were there for everyone to see. The Ottoman state had intentionally put to the sword hundreds of thousands

of Armenians! This had already shown even before the onset of the 20th century how burning was the Armenian question. Who could have guaranteed that a problem of such gigantic dimensions would not spill over to Russian Armenia itself in the near future? When a fire starts in a neighbour's house, everyone immediately thinks whether it will carry over to their own house. It is difficult to understand that such a problem should not have found its way, and this in a priority manner, to the agenda of Armenian Bolsheviks. To learn from comparison with a hypothetical example, can anyone imagine Kurdish parties remaining aloof to what is happening in the other parts of Kurdistan?

This is not all. The Leninist conception of internationalism is not abstract, as opposed to that of Rosa Luxemburg, for instance.⁴⁹ It includes within itself, in dialectical manner, the national liberation of oppressed nations as an inseparable element.⁵⁰ The fact that Caucasian Bolshevism excluded the Armenian national question from its programme and strategy means turning its back on the Ottoman Armenian, whose predicament of harsh oppression had already come out clearly in the last third of the 19th century. Let us explain this in a different manner: when struggling against nationalist socialists in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg erred because she did this by choosing to ignore the question itself. The emergence of a unified Poland as a result of the unification of the three parts at the end of World War One was a practical refutation of Luxemburg's approach to the question. The alternative to a *nationalist* approach to the national question is not to overlook that question. The alternative is to approach a veritable national question in an *internationalist* manner. The fact that while Lenin defined the duty of the socialists of the oppressor nation as the recognition of the right to self-determination of the oppressed nation, he attributed, asymmetrically, the duty of defending unity between the oppressor and the oppressed nations was a consequence precisely of this internationalist outlook. In other words, Rosa Luxemburg should not have denied the veracity of the national question in Poland, but should have explained to the Polish working class that the national question could be solved in a context of unity with Russia. She should not have turned her back on the national question itself.

The same is true of Caucasian Bolshevism. The fact that Shaumian and his comrades turned their backs on the national question to concentrate exclusively on class struggle engendered very adverse results. (1) Because the Armenian national question was (and is) a veritable national question, the Armenians remained aloof on Bolshevism outside of the large cities and organised in petty-bourgeois socialist parties. (2) Caucasian Bolshevism remained helpless when confronted with the catastrophe experienced by the Anatolian Armenians. (3) Turning one's back to the national question also prevented intellectual and practical work on the question of what concrete policies would be helpful in overcoming national (at times nationalist) divisions between the diverse peoples who lived in the Caucasus in an intertwined

49 For a comparison of the approaches of these two great Marxists to the national question, see our *Kod Adı Küreselleşme. 21. Yüzyılda Emperyalizm* [Code Name Globalisation. Imperialism in the 21st Century], Enlarged 3rd Edition, Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2011, pp. 318-346.

50 For the entire theoretical framework of Lenin's approach to the "question of nations" as we call it, see our "Lenin as Alternative", *Revolutionary Marxism* 2024.

manner.

It may be said that at the basis of the oversight of Caucasian Bolshevism with respect to the Armenian national question lies the over-generalisation of Lenin's principle, already touched upon above, of the defence of unity with the oppressor nation as the duty of Marxists of the oppressed nation. This principle cannot and should not be applied to every case. If it is, the socialists of a country are dutybound to organise under the roof of the same party in a multinational country. But if unity will not be defended for some nation, then the communist party of the oppressed nation should be organised independently. For the revolutionary party is the nucleus of revolutionary power, it is a candidate for ruling the government. If a separate state is going to be defended, then there needs to be a separate party of that nation.

Even in those situations in which a separate state will not be defended, if the oppressed nation has other parts spread out in neighbouring countries, (the pre-unification Poland, today's Kurdistan etc.), the unified communist party of the country has to concern itself with the other (cross-frontier) parts of that oppressed nation. That nation has to be in a position to be free to establish certain autonomous governmental structures if the necessity arises, and the International to which the unified communist party belongs to needs to deliberate on this question extensively. The cost will be truly great if all this is not heeded.

Moreover, this is a corollary of proletarian internationalism. Whereas proletarian internationalists have put their heart and mind into spreading the fire of revolution to different climes and peoples of the world, how is it possible for them to remain indifferent to the problems experienced by their national kin, even if the programmatic objective does not (yet) stipulate a unification for that oppressed nationality?

At the basis of all this lies the refusal by Lenin of federal forms before the October revolution, the fact that although he defended the right of nations to self-determination unswervingly, once this right has been utilised and separation shunned, an absolute sway of the central state would be the rule. The same Lenin saw, after the revolution, that federalism is the only way forward in resisting the socialism of the oppressor nation and struggled with supra-human energy, even in his sick bed, to see to it that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in compliance with the federal principle supreme.⁵¹

Here comes in the second question, which is also of great actuality. Debates on programme and strategy cannot be confined to the past. The conclusions with respect to the present and the future should definitely be drawn. The second issue that we raised when we were talking about the two problems in its approach to the Armenian question is of burning actuality. What methods are to be used in solving the historic contradictions between the peoples of the Caucasus? How and through what concrete policies will internationalism be given flesh and bone in the region? We criticised above Caucasian Bolshevism for not having done this. We may now broaden our perspective.

⁵¹ On this question see V. I. Lenin & Leon Trotsky, *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, 2nd Edition, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986, pp. 127-149.

Let us make a general observation: whenever there is a revolutionary upsurge in the wider geography within which the Caucasus is embedded (say Eurasia), this ends up as national massacres inside the Caucasus. Let us elaborate on this.

In 1905, when the whole of Czarist Russia was being shaken by the forward leap of the revolution, The Southern Caucasus witnessed a mutual massacre! In the months following the 1917 revolution, the revolutionary banner raised by the Baku Commune (in 1918) in the Southern Caucasus was again soiled by the struggles between the Azeri and the Armenian. Nakhchivan and Nagorno Karabagh constantly created frictions between the two nations in the early period of the Soviet Union. When the Gorbachev reforms led to a thaw in political life, the successive events of Sumgait, Khojaly, and Nagorno Karabagh turned the Southern Caucasus into a tinderbox. The tinderbox has erupted again and again recently and veritable wars have been waged between Armenia, on the one side, and Azerbaijan and Turkey, on the other. The Armenian-Azeri tension is still covering up all other types of political questions in the Southern Caucasus.

At this point, we can pass on to Anatolia. We mentioned above how the mutual claims between the two sides in the face of the historic fact that Eastern Anatolia was Western Armenia rendered any solution to controversies more difficult. Since the Azeris are a people that claim Turkic pedigree, these tensions bear a certain continuity with the debate in Southern Caucasia or, even more, they are integrated into that debate. If no Turkish government was able to improve Turkey's relations with Armenia in the last four decades, there is behind this, to only a certain extent, of course, the fact that the Azeri-Armenian conflict stays the hand of Turkish governments. But in Anatolia the question does not remain a Turkish-Armenian tension. At least in part, the territory that the Armenians claim as their fatherland is also considered as their fatherland by the Kurds. In other words, there is a triple claim on one and the same territory and they all contradict each other.

Under these circumstances, the national question along the line that connects Anatolia and the Caucasus can only be solved on the basis of the defence of a federation. It is not possible to reach a just, durable and stable solution regarding the national contradictions between the Turk (and the Azeri), the Armenian, and the Kurd that are a legacy from the depths of history on the basis of independent nation states. As the massacres and struggles that have been going on for longer than a century, at least from 1894-1896 on, show, these contradictions are of a strategic kind. The debate on the Armenian genocide is not simply an ethical question (although there is that aspect as well). It is a necessary debate if tomorrow's revolution is to be triumphant in Anatolia and the Caucasus. It is a debate on programme and strategy.

We thus see the solution to the question that posed the most difficult of assessments in the context of this article, that is, the evaluation of a correct position on the Eastern Front (between Armenia and Turkey), emerge on the horizon. In the aftermath of the great massacre that Anatolia went through, what should have been done was to create a state organisation, in the form of a federation, that would provide every people the possibility of the guarantee of its safety and security. It would be the Turks to hold state power in Adana and the Armenians in Sis and Zeytun. These fine details would only be arranged in a just manner on the basis of honest negotiations

between the communist governments of the entire region. These are all details. What is important is the principle of federation.

We do have a precedent here. This programme was defended for the proletariat of Turkey by the Communist Party of Turkey, which was founded in Baku on 10 September 1920 in its capacity of the Turkish section (or “section in Turkey”, if that is more desirable) of the Communist International. This party under the leadership of Mustafa Suphi was pursuing the goal, on the one hand, of joining forces with the Ankara government in the latter’s struggle against the imperialist occupation and that of its proxies, but, on the other hand, as opposed to the Ankara government it defended, in its programme, the federation form if this proved necessary for granting the legitimate rights of all the other peoples living on Anatolian soil. How lucky are the communists of Turkey for inheriting the legacy of the original Communist Party of Turkey!

Unfortunately, the leadership of this party, Mustafa Suphi and 14 of his leading comrades were murdered by the agents of the Turkish bourgeoisie on the night of 28-29 January 1921. It is appalling to see that the fates of Mustafa Suphi and Stepan Shaumian turned out to be so similar. The murder of these two leaders by reactionary forces, along with their leading comrades, symbolises, in our opinion, the elimination of the conditions for the resolution of the Turco-Armenian question in the course of the 20th century.

The Stepan Shaumians and the Mustafa Suphis of the 21st century will again assume the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat and see to it that the two peoples live together again as they did for centuries. But not as *millet-i hâkime* and *millet-i sâdıka* this time! They will make it possible for the two peoples to embrace each other under conditions that will leave no space for the oppressor and the oppressed.

To work day and night to arrive at this condition is the best apology to be addressed to the victims of the Armenian genocide.

Political Marxism: A Refutation

Alp Yücel Kaya

Introduction

Political Marxists used to focus on England to discuss the origins of capitalism and/or capitalist development; in recent years they enlarged the geographical spectrum and launched case studies to continue to do so in order to claim a universal character for their theoretical argument.¹ They resume their theoretical starting point as well as their critical perspective towards the Marxist literature examining capitalist development and bourgeois revolutions as follows:

Marx's early work, and especially the *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto*, accepted the narrative of historical development promoted by liberal historians and political economists. With the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, however, Marx broke with the liberal paradigm, offering a radical critique of classical political

¹ Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism, Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development, and Political Conflict 1620-1877*, Brill, 2011; Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post (eds.), *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism*, Springer International Publishing, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; Xavier Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France, Class Structures, Economic Development, the State and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1750–1914*, Brill, 2019; Eren Düzgün, *Capitalism, Jacobinism and International Relations, Revisiting Turkish Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 2022; Xavier Lafrance and Stephen Miller, *Transition to Capitalism in Modern France, Primitive Accumulation and Markets from the Old Regime to the Post-WWII Era*, Brill, 2024; Javier Moreno Zacarés, *Residential Capitalism, Rent Extraction and Capitalist Production in Modern Spain (1833–2023)*, Routledge, 2024.