

## Rise and fall of Communism in Turkey - 1 (1917-1980)

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*"In these lands, everyone is already a communist. It's just that after the [2014] elections everyone has registered their communist identity."*<sup>2</sup>

This noted aphorism by Fatih Mehmet Maçoğlu, the first-ever self-declared communist to win a local election under the banner of the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) in Turkey's modern history, may actually be said to mark the first step of a potential communist takeover of the country. He may fail. But that is not the point. The point is that the 'Kominist Baskan,' or the Communist President, has actually showed us that the *End of History* has not yet arrived and may never do so. Communist ideology still alive, still kicking – well, at least at the very local level.

Maçoğlu first came to the public attention when he was elected as the mayor of a small town, Ovacık, in eastern Turkey in 2014. As soon as he took office, he had all the empty municipal lands cleaned up, and then distributed them to the low-income families. Less than three years, he turned Ovacık into some sort of a heaven where residents enjoy free transportation, free education, a huge library and clean drinking water at a very low cost.

Maçoğlu's success, perhaps unsurprisingly, made an overwhelming impression across Turkey, which paved the way for him to win the mayorship of Tunceli province in the 2019 local elections. Communists, for the first time in the history of Turkey, will be administering the municipality of a province. Yes, it really is the first time, and let's hope it won't be the last!

However, this telling success story, perhaps unsurprisingly, shows us only one side of the coin. On the other, one finds a long history that encompasses a wide variety of communist and socialist ideologies, political movements, struggles, obstacles, resistance and political oppression. This paper therefore focuses on the complex history of Turkish communism, seeking to understand how and when it came into existence, why it was largely opposed by both the founding Kemalist regime and by the governments that followed, and what kept it going until today even though it mostly remained an elitist and intellectual ideology in Turkey.

A group of Turkish revolutionaries led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Republic of Turkey in 1923 after the Ottoman Empire was practically wiped off the world stage at the end of World War I. Even though Turkish communists/socialists enjoyed relative independence and effectiveness in 1920s, the Kemalist regime largely denied them any significant role in the formation of the republic during this era. In the lead up to the second half of the 20th century, Turkish governments cyclically oppressed not only communists and socialists but also any kind of opposition voices in Turkey. After the country's transformation into a multi-party regime with the pro-American Democrat Party (DP) in 1946 and its accession to NATO in 1952, anti-communism reached a dimension never before experienced. In the harsh realities of the Cold War and the existing Soviet threat breathing down Turkey's neck in the second half of the 20th century, Turkish governments developed a propaganda apparatus designed to

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published by [The Circle](#).

<sup>2</sup> "Turkey's Communist Party gets their first-ever mayor," Daily Sabah, accessed Nov 22, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/04/01/turkeys-communist-party-gets-their-firstever-mayor>

fight the communist threat on an ideological front, and to keep the necessity of the existing alliance with the West alive. In the 1950s, the two rival parties -- the CHP and the DP -- often accused each other of serving the purposes of communism. Due to the deliberate anti-communist policies carried out in the Cold War-era Turkey, communism naturally ended up being an ideology adopted and desired only by an elitist and intellectual segment of Turkish society. Except for the Workers Party of Turkey (TİP), no communist/socialist political party has truly been embraced by large masses of people in the history of the Republic. In the present day, Turks often associate the word “communism” with atheism, chaos, and instability. The electoral success of communist parties have therefore always been extremely low since the 1960s, when Turkey adopted its more liberal and relatively democratic 1961 Constitution.

### **Communism during the pre-Republic Era (1917 – 1923)**

The Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire endured a similar end at the end of the World War I. The Ottoman Empire lost the war with its allies Germany and Austro-Hungarian Empire and entered a painful process of disintegration. With the Armistice of Mudros, a right to occupy capital İstanbul and forts controlling the straits, was given to the Allies, and this basically ended the *de-facto* existence of the Padishah and the monarchical government in İstanbul. The irremediable surrender of the Padishah eventually led to the formation of a civil resistance in Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk brought this dispersed resistance together under the roof of *Kuva-yı Milliye*, opened the Grand Turkish National Assembly on 23rd April 1920 and had started the Turkish war for independence, which was fought between May 19, 1919 – July 24, 1923 against the United Kingdom and the proxies of the Allies.<sup>3</sup> By September 18, 1922, the struggle resulted in success and the occupying Greek armies and Armenian troops were completely expelled from Anatolia. With the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the sovereignty of the "Republic of Turkey" as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, was recognized by the Allied powers, namely Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and Greece.

On the northern side of the Black sea, things were not so different. After the Bolsheviks came to power with a revolution in November 1917, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918, which officially ended the Russia's participation in World War I. A civil war between the Red and White armies war lasted for almost five years and Soviet Union was founded in 1922.

In general terms, the harsh consequences of the World War I, compelled the two former enemies to turn over a new leaf, ironically bringing them closer perhaps more than ever in the history. After all, Atatürk-led Turkish resistance movement was fighting against imperialist British-backed Greek army for survival while the Russians were doing the same against Imperialism. According to Turkish historian Kemal Karpat, Turkey’s new leader Atatürk had made a great effort to establish a healthy and manageable relation with the Bolsheviks during the War of Independence. In fact, a two-page letter which was allegedly sent by Atatürk to Vladimir Lenin on January 4, 1922 revealed that the Turkish leader assured that his government was in solidarity with Bolsheviks in the fight against “capitalism.”<sup>4</sup> The letters

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<sup>3</sup> Kemal Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2010), 281.

<sup>4</sup> See, “Atatürk'ün Lenin'e Gönderdiği Sansürlenmiş Mektubu,” accessed April 30, 2019.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/31118299/Ataturk-un-Lenin-e-Gonderdi%C4%9Fi-Sansurlenen-Mektubu>

made public in 2003 by a Turkish daily, *Aydınlık*, according to which Atatürk implied that as soon as the War of Independence comes to an end with success, Turkey's direction would be deflected into Socialism:

As soon as we liberate our homeland from the enemies, we intent to nationalize the largest companies that are of vital importance to our country. Therefore, we will be able to prevent the bourgeoisie from dominating the country. [...] As one can see, our political system is not based on separation of power. This system [separation of power] which has been designed to strengthen the domination of capitalism on our nation and to take advantage of political power, arouse hatred. In that sense, we are way closer to Soviet system than we are to Capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

The daily was harshly criticized and lambasted by Turkey's Kemalist segment and eventually had to withdraw the copies of the letters from its website. However, even if the letter was fabricated or somehow distorted by the daily, one thing is certain: after the World War I, due to their common enemy – imperialism, -- two former enemies started to get closer. On March 16, 1920, a treaty of brotherhood was signed between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk, and Bolshevik Russia under the leadership of Lenin. The treaty was significant as it was the first time a major state officially recognized the Atatürk-led Turkish government and *Misakı Milli* borders which were accepted by the last existing Ottoman parliament on 28th January 1920. With the treaty, the two countries basically agreed to respect each other's right for self-determination and pledged to show solidarity in the struggle against imperialism, and more importantly Soviet Union agreed to provide military aid to insubstantial Turkish army. There were many different reasons behind the betterment of the relations between the two countries, according to Semyon Ivanovich Aralov; yet most important one was Atatürk's ability in understanding the socialist revolution.<sup>6</sup> "He is by no means a socialist. Yet, it seems, he is a progressivist statesman. [...] I believe he will humiliate the Capitalists and wipe away the Padishah and his stooges," Aralov wrote in his book *Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Anıları*.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Green Army**

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the leaders of the two countries had managed to create an amicable atmosphere in early 1920s. Securing political and military support from the Soviet government was extremely crucial for the Turkish authorities in their fight during the struggle for independence. In the period between the initial formation of resistance movement in early 1918 to the independence in 1923, right and left wing opposition emerged within the Turkish government and the *Kuva-yı Milliye*. The left wing basically included three different tendencies influenced by the October Revolution, including anti-imperialist Islamist socialists and also hardcore communists. Yet, regardless of their tendencies, they had one thing in common: anti-Imperialism/anti-Westernism. This left wing, for the first time in the post-Ottoman era, made its initial official appearance with the formation of *Yeşil Ordu* (Green Army) in May 1920.<sup>8</sup> The Green army was not an actual army, but a political organization and it was established with the approval of Atatürk in order to counter the "Army of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Semyon İvanoviç Aralov, *Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Anıları* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2017), 70.

<sup>7</sup> Aralov, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Emel Akal, *Moskova-Ankara-Londra üçgeninde: İştirakiyuncular, komünistler ve Paşa hazretleri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 31.

Caliphate,” a nationalist group that was in favor of restoration the position of sultanate and monarchy.<sup>9</sup> Acknowledging the fact that the organization was intentionally fostered by Mustafa Kemal against a possible rise of the Ottoman Padishah from the ashes, many historians believe that it was partly an outcome of peasant discontent. For example, according to Ivan Spector, “much of the deep-rooted agrarian discontent which in many parts of Turkey had resulted in spontaneous pro-Soviet demonstrations by the peasantry in 1919, found more organized expression after the establishment of the Grand National Assembly in 1920, in the formation of the Green army, which pledged its support to Turkish Revolution.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, E. H. Carr also maintained that it would be safe to take the Green army as an extension of a peasant movement, which derived from agrarian dissatisfaction.<sup>11</sup>

The organization had also a military offshoot which was under the command of Ethem the Circassian, a Turkish militia leader of Circassian origin.<sup>12</sup> When he and his troop joined the Green army in 1920, he made it clear in an article he wrote for pro-Bolshevik *Seyyare-i Yeni Dünya* newspaper that he was in a struggle for a revolution that would bring a reunification within the principles of social democracy. In a lot of ways, the goals and efforts of its founders were clear; they had a pro-Bolshevik stance and were in favor of a 1917-style revolution in Turkey. They were basically in a dream of establishing a political regime which was harmonized with Islamic principles and communism.<sup>13</sup> However, after Ethem rebelled against Kemal Ataturk and the authority of the Grand National Assembly in late 1920, he was brutally suppressed and forced to flee Anatolia. Upon his departure, the Green Army began to lose power both politically and militarily, paving way for Ataturk to scatter the remaining leading figures of the organization for good.

### **Communist Party of Turkey (TKP)**

In September 1920, a group of Turkish socialists who eye-witnessed the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, established the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) in Baku. Several days later, the first congress of the party was held in Baku with participation of 74 delegates from Anatolia, Istanbul and Soviet Union and Mustafa Suphi was elected as the president of TKP while Ethem Nejat was elected as General Secretary.<sup>14</sup>

The party was located outside of the *Misak-ı Milli* borders, the National Pact that established the future Turkey`s borders during the very last meeting of Ottoman parliament in January 1920. Therefore, several months after the establishment, the leaders of the organization set the Anatolia as main target. After a discreet exchange of letters with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the Ankara government, the organization`s leader Mustapha Suphi along with fourteen other leading figures left Baku for Anatolia in December 1917 in order to join the War of Independence.<sup>15</sup> However, soon after they arrived in Anatolia, the group were forcefully “put in a boat destined for Batumi. However immediately after they embarked another boat left the

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<sup>9</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Tauris 2004), 158

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1959), 67

<sup>11</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923, Vol. 3* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958) 300.

<sup>12</sup> Suat Kili, *Türk Devrim Tarihi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Bankası, 2008) 250.

<sup>13</sup> Kili, 253.

<sup>14</sup> "Türkiye Komünist Partisi 58 Yaşında", *Ürün Sosyalist Dergi Vol 51*, September 1978, p.29

<sup>15</sup> Bulent Gokay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920-1991: Soviet Foreign Policy, Turkey and Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 10.

harbor and overtook them.”<sup>16</sup> According to Turkish political scientist Bülent Gökay, the incident was nothing but “a classic Ottoman-style elimination.”<sup>17</sup>

Even though Suphi failed to shift the center of the TKP’s activities to Anatolia, he admittedly claimed a place in the history of Turkish communism as he had played a significant role in intellectual and activist advancement of communist ideology among Turks. According to the information provided by Marxists Internet Archive Encyclopedia, Suphi was arrested by the Russian gov’t during the World War I, and he was exiled to the area of Ural where he became acquainted with the Bolshevism and later joined to the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik).<sup>18</sup> He was the first Turk to organize the “Congress of the Turkish Left Socialists” in Moscow in 1918. Only a year later, he established and chaired the first communist newspaper in Turkish language named *Yeni Dünya* (New World). However, his annihilation was far from inflicting a serious impact on Soviet-Ankara government relations. Yet, Gökay argues that the incident was an explicit indication that the more Atatürk and his government gain strength and come close declaring independence, the less they would give a room for further Soviet influence. Also, TKP leaders’ annihilation showed that Atatürk could easily withdraw tolerance from local communists.

During the 1920s, the communists and socialists were weak and were thus denied any part in the new Turkey. The Turkish government under Mustafa Kemal pursued a cat-and-mouse policy towards local communists. Sometimes they were tolerated and sometimes were repressed.<sup>19</sup>

After Mustafa Suphi was killed, Şerif Hüsnü, a Turkish communist based in İstanbul, assumed the leadership of the *TKP*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Official Communist Party of Turkey (TKP)**

When the aforementioned Green Army was abolished, some of the members established the Communist Party of Turkey in September 1920. This party was established at Atatürk’s approval in order to end illegal and informal organization of Turkish communist across Anatolia. In fact, the founders of the party included Tevfik Rüştü Aras, Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, Celal Bayar, Yunus Nadi, Kılıç Ali, Hakkı Behiç Bayıç, İhsan Eryavuz, Refik Koraltan, Eyüp Sabri Akgöl.<sup>21</sup> These people had already close relations with Atatürk himself and they played significant roles during the War of Independence. Therefore, it would be safe to say that Turkey’s first official communist party was established in the control of the ruling elite. In other words, Green Army which was formed outside of the control of Atatürk and Ankara government, was turned into a controlled, and manageable political party for Moreover, Atatürk and his senior aides and leading commanders of the Turkish army, Fevzi Çakmak, Ali Fuat Cebesoy, Refet Bele, İsmet İnönü and Kâzım Karabekir, ironically became members of

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<sup>16</sup> Gokay, 10

<sup>17</sup> Gokay, 10

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa Suphi, “Encyclopedia of Marxism” accessed Nov 22, 2017. <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/s/u.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Gokay, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Hakkı Uyar, *Tek Parti Dönemi ve Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (İstanbul: Boyut Kitapları, 1999) 135-136.

<sup>21</sup> Akal, *Moskova-Ankara-Londra üçgeninde : İştirakiyuncular, komünistler ve Paşa hazretleri*, 279-280.

the communist party. The party was closed down by the Ankara government only three months after it was established.

### **Communism during the single party era (1923 - 1946)**

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey officially announced the establishment of the Republic in Turkey on October 29, 1923. With the Ankara's announcement, the era of Ottoman Empire officially came to an end, İstanbul-based last Ottoman Sultan fled Anatolia for good. With the aim of constructing a secular nation-state, from then on, Ataturk and his government set to initiate a rigorous revolution containing almost every realm of Turkish society. This revolution, which later came to be known as *Kemalist devrim* (revolution), had basically six fundamental pillars: Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism, Secularism, Statism, and Reformism.

During the early years of the single-party period which lasted between 1923 and 1945, the TKP<sup>22</sup> maintained its existence across Anatolia in form of a clandestine organization. It was quite weak and lacked proper organizational structure. However, it would be safe to argue that Turkish communists, acting on a motto of desperate times call for desperate measure, managed to withhold their resentment of state oppression, because they were in fear that if the Kemalist regime collapses, the newly founded Turkish state could easily be deflected into certain influence of imperialism. Maintaining a similar approach on the issue, Bülent Gökay argued that for communists, the Kemalist regime in 1920s was the only existing power that would prevent Turkey from being an imperialist tool in efforts to encircle the Soviet Union. In his own words;

The Turkish communists considered the Kemalist ruling party as a bourgeois reformist party that was the lesser evil under the circumstances. It thought that if the Kemalists were expelled from power, reactionary forces would regain rule and inevitably bring the country once again under imperialist tutelage. This would leave Turkey as a link in the 'cordon sanitaire', or chain of satellite states with which imperialism had encircled the Soviet Union. In those days, the one and only missing link in that chain was Kemalist Turkey, and preventing the closure of the chain was considered an urgent international task. The Komintern and the TKP had identical views on this issue.

This is, of course, not to deny the discomfort within the TKP towards Kemalist regime. Even though the regime was seen by the Turkish communists as the mere source of resistance against imperialism, this never meant that either Ataturk or his government including İsmet Pasha, had been in favor of a radical social revolution. Before and after the establishment of the republic, Ataturk himself had made it clear many times that neither the required conditions, nor any need for a revolution had ever existed. In his own words;

As to Bolsheviks, there is no room whatever in our country for this doctrine, our religion and customs as well as our social organization being entirely unfavorable to its implementation. In Turkey, there are neither great capitalists nor millions or artisans and workingmen. On the other hand, we are not saddled with an agrarian question. Finally, from the social point of view, our

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<sup>22</sup> From here on, the TKP refers only to the one established by Mustafa Suphi in Baku. See p.5

religious principles are such as to dispense us with the adoption of Bolshevism.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, it is not possible to perceive statism, one of the most important pillars of Kemalism, as an alternative to capitalism. On the contrary, especially in the 1930s, statism had been used by the Kemalist elite as an auxiliary power to boast an economic system, in which the Turkish state actively subsidizes, provides services to, regulates, and most of the times controls investor-owned business. However, unlike in the Soviet Union, state capitalism in Turkey was not touted as a step on the road to socialism.

In mid-1920s, the Kemalist regime and its nation-building projects had started to face domestic challenges by pro-monarchic, pro-Kurdish and religious groups. In 1925, the regime was stroke by a revolt of Kurdish peasants, which was rapidly embraced by large masses in Eastern Anatolia. Armed Kurdish peasants, led by a dervish order named Shaikh Said, rebelled against the central government in protest of the firm reforms of secularization and social, economic degradation. This incident became quite significant because the Kemalist regime openly and brutally suppressed the Kurdish rebellion, adopted a oppressive stance against any kind of opposition, closed down the [already-controlled] opposition party, arrested all of it leading figures, shut down eight leading newspapers, magazines and many journalists were sent to prisons.<sup>24</sup> Even though TKP and other independent Turkish communists' roles were extremely limited in the rebellion, communism ended up receiving their share of oppression at the end. Among the media outlets closed down by Ataturk, were the two of the most important communist newspapers; *Orak-Çekiç* (Hammer and Sickle), *Aydınlık* (Light).<sup>25</sup> From 1925 on, communism was forced by the Kemalist regime to go underground. *Aydınlık*'s lead writers and leading communist intellectuals including Refik Hüsni and Hasan Ali fled Turkey, while many others were arrested, itinerant extraordinary tribunals named *İstiklal Mahkemeleri* (so-called Courts of Independence) and eventually given long prison sentences on treason charges.<sup>26</sup> The appalling conditions, hazy political atmosphere, powerful one-party regime under the Republican People's Party (CHP) in Turkey and the changing conditions with Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union, had ultimately complicated the communists struggle for existence in open day.<sup>27</sup> Turkey's communists/socialist were forced to remain underground and mostly inactive under the roof of (illegal) TKP until 1932, when several former TKP members established a leftist magazine named *Kadro Dergisi*. Instead of openly calling for a revolution, the magazine tried to encourage Kemalist regime to adopt an industrialization policy liberated from imperialist influence. *Kadro Dergisi* authors were, however, far away from posing an opposition to the existing single-party regime and the party leadership; instead they adopted a materialist stance and defended aforementioned statism against liberal economy. In other words, *Kadro Dergisi* was a small group of former TKP intellectuals who, in a sense, advocated state-capitalism and state interventionism. However, it is possible to say that the magazine and its founders were both under the control of the regime and Ataturk himself. In fact, according to leftist political scientist Türkkaya Ataöv, *Kadro* was

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<sup>23</sup> Harris, George, Criss, Bilge, ed. *Studies in Atatürk's Turkey: The American Dimension* (Boston: Brill, 2009) 205-206.

<sup>24</sup> Gokay, 40-41.

<sup>25</sup> Gavin D. Brockett, *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2011) 63.

<sup>26</sup> Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar – I* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009) 202.

<sup>27</sup> Tunçay, 202.

simply a Kemalist movement and its editorial policy was always in accordance with the founding principles of the republic.<sup>28</sup> Yet, despite its submissive stance, the magazine was shut down in 1934 and its grant holder Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu was sent to Albania as an ambassador.

After Atatürk died November 10, 1938, he was declared *Ebedi Şef* (Eternal chief) by the Republican People's Party, and Mustafa İsmet İnönü was elected the second President of the Republic of Turkey. İnönü, the prime minister of Atatürk era, was also granted the official title of *Milli Şef* (National Chief) in 1938 and during his presidency, the Turkish government had continued an authoritarian one-party regime. Also, the CHP's oppressive stance towards Turkish communists/socialists had become even tougher. For instance, Nâzım Hikmet Ran, a widely-known Turkish poet, playwright and novelist, whose writings have been translated into almost sixty different languages, was given 15 years in prison on charges of communist propaganda. In the same year, another Turkish court ruled for 28 years in prison for Nazım Hikmet on similar charges while Kemal Tahir, another prominent Turkish novelist and intellectual, was given 15 years in prison.<sup>29</sup> Kemal Karpat, a Turkish historian and former professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, argues in his book *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi* that communists and socialists in Turkey during this period were not so different for the Turkish authorities and they were all treated as potential traitors.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this unbreakable prejudgment and political oppression, TKP, under the leadership of Reşat Fuat Baraner began to come alive again in 1943. His leadership in TKP coincided with the time period Soviets re-occupied half of the territories captured by the Germans in 1941 and 1942. Taking a courage from Soviet success during the second part of the World War, Turkey's communists were now gradually coming to light under the roof of TKP, even though it was still not a legal political organization. However, the efforts for revival lasted only a short time as the CHP government initiated a widespread purge against TKP members in early 1944, and detained at 64 members, including Fuat Baraner and other leading party figures. He was given 9 years in prison and stayed in different prisons in İstanbul and Ankara until 1950.<sup>31</sup> However, operations were not only limited to TKP leaders, but also included the TKP's alleged youth offshoot, *Ileri Gençlik Birliği (IGB)*. During that time period, tens of youngsters from the IGB were arrested by the Turkish government and many of them allegedly subjected to torture and ill treatment in police custody.

### **Communism during the multi-party era (1946 – 1980)**

As a result of some significant external and internal factors, the Republic of Turkey had transformed to multi-party regime with the establishment of Democrat Party (DP) in 1946.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Türkçü Ataöv "Şevket Süreyya ile Kadro Dergisi Üzerine; Suyu arayan adam" interview by *Türk Solu*, June 6, 2006, <http://www.turksolu.com.tr/191/ataov191.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Tevfik Çavdar, *Türkiye'nin Demokrasi Tarihi - 1950'den Günümüze* (İstanbul: İmge Kitabevi, 2013) 338.

Note: In the present day, both Kemal Tahir and Nazım Hikmet are commonly known and revered by the Turkish nation.

<sup>30</sup> Kemal Karpat, 297.

<sup>31</sup> Şenol Çarık, "Atatürk'ün karakolda işkence gören sosyalist kuzeni," *Oda TV*, August 13, 2016, <http://odatv.com/ataturkun-karakolda-iskence-goren-sosyalist-kuzeni-1308161200.html>. Note: According to Şenol Çalık, Baraner was subjected to heavy torture after his arrest even though he was a distant relative of Kemal Atatürk.

<sup>32</sup> For details see: Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton Legacy Library, 1959)



This moderate right wing political party rose to power by de-seating the decades old Republican People's Party in 1950. Just like CHP, DP was also both had ideologies rooted in Kemalism, however, until it was overthrown by the Turkish military in 1961, DP government were going to bring Turkey into a pro-American orbit. In 1952, Turkey initially joined NATO, and then applied for associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959. Nevertheless, Turkey's transition to multi-party system had given a relative opportunity to Turkey's communists/socialists. Between 1946-1950, two more political parties were established: Socialist Party of Turkey (TSP) and Socialist Laborer Peasant Party of Turkey (TSEKP). These two parties were established by the former members of the TKP. Yet, they were far from playing any significant role in Turkish political life as the former one had lived only two years while the latter one was closed down in only six months. Along with these political parties, first labor unions in the history of the Republic were opened in 1947.

In 1947, Turkey was designated by the United States Congress as a recipient of economic and military assistance under the provisions of the Truman Doctrine. From then on, the US-Turkish relations for the next four decades, were based on mutual partnership in containing Communist expansion in the Middle East. This literally meant that the Cold War years would bring nothing but oppression, fear and political enmity to Turkey's communists and socialists. The US government had a clear message: as long as Turkey stayed on the side of Western world, economic and military aids would keep coming. Therefore, even though the two rivalling parties, CHP and DP, drifted apart about almost every single domestic issue, they were in compliance in fight against communism along with the US.<sup>33</sup> The more the DP opened Turkey to US influence during 1950s, the more the oppression on communists increased. In 1951, Şefik Hüsnü, the leader of the TKP, was given 6 years in jail on charges of being the leader of the TKP. Basically, TKP was being perceived as an illegal organization and establishing any kind of relation with it was openly considered a crime by the DP government.

Following the overthrow of the DP gov't and execution of Turkish PM Adnan Menderes, Turkey adopted a new constitution in 1961. Even though it continued to include the main principles of Kemalism, the 1961 constitution was surprisingly quite inclusive and secured the freedoms of thought, expression, and publication at all times. Also, the term "social state" was included in the constitution for the first time since 1923. In this atmosphere of relative freedom, leaders of a group of labor unions managed to establish the Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) in 1961. Four years later, the TİP participated in the national elections of 1965 and became the first socialist party to win a representation in the parliament. This relative victory can be seen as an indication that TİP was not only an elitist, intellectual organization, but also a party embraced by large masses.<sup>34</sup> The TİP leaders were openly in favor of a close cooperation with the Communist block and Soviet Russia, rather than Capitalist United States. The party also "called for the redistribution of land, nationalization of industry and financial institutions, exclusion of foreign capital."<sup>35</sup> The party participated in another national elections in 1969 and managed to win a total of 243,631 votes.<sup>36</sup> Even though 1960s saw an

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<sup>33</sup> Çetin Yetkin, *Karşı Devrim* (İstanbul, Kilit Yayınevi, 2012) 524.

<sup>34</sup> The party managed to win 276,101 votes and gain 14 seats. See the official results of 1965 election: <http://www.secim-sonuclari.com/turkiye-isci-partisi/1965/istanbul.parti>

<sup>35</sup> Gokay, 88-89.

<sup>36</sup> Official results of 1965 election: <http://www.secim-sonuclari.com/turkiye-isci-partisi/1965/istanbul.parti>

unprecedented advancements in Turkish left, along with all the political parties, TİP and other socialist and communist organizations were completely banned after a military memorandum in 1971. The party's leader, deputies, and its leading figures were given long prison sentences by the military-backed regime. This military crackdown had a significant impact on Turkish revolutionaries, which produced three different radical organizations in the 1970s: (1) People's Liberation Army of Turkey, (2) People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey, (3) The Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist–Leninist. All three of these organizations were armed and largely influenced by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China. 1970s are regarded as lost years in almost every sense, because Turkey had ten different government between 1971 and 1980. The instability and failure of the existing Turkish politicians to form a strong government to defer anarchic atmosphere, led to a reign of terror and over five thousand civilians were killed in the second part of 1970s. According to political scientist Sabri Sayarı, even though the drift into total terrorism was largely the product of domestic political and social developments, “the state-sponsored terrorism largely facilitated the rapid proliferation of leftist, rightist, and separatist armed extremist groups.”<sup>37</sup>

It would be safe to argue that, even though Turkey's leftists have experienced extremely difficult times since the foundation of the Republic, no other era was as harsh as the 1970s. During this time period, tens of leftists were either executed or went missing. The series of crackdowns began with still-remembered execution of the leader of the aforementioned People's Liberation Army of Turkey. Deniz Gezmiş, a Turkish Marxist-Leninist revolutionary student and political activist and two of his comrades, Yusuf Alan, Hüseyin İnan, were executed by the Turkish authorities in 1972 for attempting to overthrow the constitutional order. Soon after their executions, these three people became a rallying figure for the Turkish left. In present day, their photos often appear at public rallies, mass demonstrations against the Turkish government.

In a similar vein, İbrahim Kaypakkaya, the leader of aforementioned Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist–Leninist, was believed to be assassinated by the Turkish authorities while in prison in 1973. According to an alleged Turkish Intelligence (MIT) report, Kaypakkaya was the most dangerous communists.

Within the communist movement in Turkey, İbrahim Kaypakkaya's ideas are the most dangerous. The views he presents in his writings and the methods of struggle he advocates are, as we can safely say, the application of revolutionary communism to Turkey.<sup>38</sup>

After the 1980 military coup, the Turkish army launched a widespread purge on all revolutionary organizations, and arrested a total of 43,140 people from all walks of life.<sup>39</sup> Of those, 21,864 were leftists that includes communists, socialists; 5,953 were rightists, nationalists; and 2,034 were Kurdish separatists.<sup>40</sup> All of the political parties and organizations were closed down with decrees issued by the Turkish army and the Communist Party of Turkey along with all other communist, socialist, leftist political organizations etc. ceased to

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<sup>37</sup> Sabri Sayarı, “Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80: A Retrospective Analysis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2 (March 2010): 198-215.

<sup>38</sup> C. Kistler, “Tribute to İbrahim Kaypakkaya,” *Redspark*, accessed December 3, 2017 <http://www.redspark.nu/en/peoples-war/turkey/tribute-to-ibrahim-kaypakkaya/>

<sup>39</sup> Michael M. Gunter, “Political Instability in Turkey During the 1970s,” *Conflict Quarterly* 9, no:1 (1989), 69-70.

<sup>40</sup> Michael M. Gunter, 69-70.

exist. In the elections held in 1983, only three parties were allowed to run by the military and Turgut Özal's center-right Anavatan (Motherland) party came to power. Özal's party had maintained a majority in the government until 1991. During 1980s, Turkish communists were largely oppressed by the army and the Turkish governments.

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