

## Preface to *Halil Çelik: A Fighter for Socialism*

Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu

30 December 2021

It has been three years since we lost Comrade Halil Çelik, who led the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu, the Turkish organization in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and who founded Mehring Yay?nc?l?k (Mehring Books) in Turkey.

This unyielding Marxist revolutionary, who cancer took from us in only a few months, saw many stormy events in his relatively short life of only 57 years. He inspired many among the younger generations with his principled internationalist perspective, his commitment to historical truth, and his unswerving orientation to the working class and its political and theoretical education. New generations of Trotskyist revolutionaries will be inspired by his invaluable political legacy.

Starting at age 16, Halil devoted his life to the cause of socialist revolution. But his imperishable legacy to the Turkish and international working class, which Halil himself viewed as his greatest political work, was his contribution to the construction of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which continues the work of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. This legacy, materialized in Halil's translations and writings, is the crucial foundation for building the Socialist Equality Party in Turkey and Trotskyist parties internationally.

In examining Halil's record from the early 1980s, what emerges is the relentless search of the most conscious elements of the Turkish working class for an international organization basing itself on Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. As ICFI Secretary Peter Schwarz wrote in his obituary of Halil:

Based on long, bitter experience with the unprincipled, nationalist and opportunist policies of pseudo-left organizations, Halil understood that the development of the Trotskyist movement in Turkey can take place only on the basis of revolutionary internationalism and requires a thorough understanding of the strategic experiences of the international working class in the course of the 20th century.

The road to a Trotskyist perspective proved to be a long and difficult one. From attempts at political collaboration with various Pabloite and Morenoite tendencies in the 1980s and 1990s, Halil drew the conclusion that it was necessary to wage a relentless struggle against the type of national opportunist politics they advanced. Such a struggle had to be based on a thorough assimilation of the Trotskyist movement's decades-long fight against social democracy, Stalinism and petty-bourgeois politics.

This struggle brought Comrade Halil and his co-thinkers ever closer to the positions of the ICFI. Halil opposed the Pabloites' attribution of a revolutionary role to Stalinism, their support of the union bureaucracy, and their glorification of bourgeois nationalism in the form of the Kurdish nationalist movement. His understanding that these positions fundamentally rejected the continuity of the Fourth International's struggle for Permanent Revolution eventually brought him to the ICFI.

It was not until the 2000s, however, that Halil and his supporters could comprehensively learn the history of the world Trotskyist movement, represented by the ICFI since its foundation in 1953 in a struggle to defend the Theory of Permanent Revolution against Pabloite revisionism.

Trotsky's Theory of the Permanent Revolution states that in countries of belated capitalist development such as Turkey, the bourgeoisie is incapable of establishing a democratic regime or of breaking the deep ties linking it to imperialism. These tasks fall to the working class, mobilized in an international struggle for proletarian socialist revolution led by a Marxist revolutionary party, and drawing behind it the broad mass of peasants. Stalinism and its nationalist theory of "socialism in one country" was a rejection, in the interests of the growing Soviet bureaucracy, of the Theory of the Permanent Revolution that guided the October Revolution in 1917.

In 1953, orthodox Trotskyists led by James P. Cannon, the leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), opposed a revisionist-liquidationist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The Pabloites sought to dissolve the Trotskyist movement into national "mass movements" dominated by various Stalinist, Social Democratic and bourgeois-nationalist parties in each country. This meant abandoning the struggle for the political independence of the working class and the building of its international leadership, the Fourth International.

The fight begun by Cannon, who led the formation of the ICFI, saved the Fourth International from destruction and ensured the continuity of the struggle for the fundamental principles of Trotskyism.

Particularly critical for Comrade Halil's group was the assimilation of the lessons of the 1985-1986 split between the orthodox Trotskyists within the ICFI and the national opportunist tendency that had developed in what was then its British section, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP).

The opportunist relations that the WRP leadership—Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Michael Banda—developed with various bourgeois-nationalist regimes and movements in the Middle East and North Africa starting in the mid-1970s eventually led to a complete break with the Theory of Permanent Revolution and Trotskyism. The priority of building the ICFI in a struggle for world socialist revolution was replaced by moves to strengthen the British party on the national arena.

This world-historical struggle constituted a decisive defeat by the ICFI of Pabloite revisionist tendencies and laid the basis for a renaissance of classical Marxism in the international working class. David North, the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the ICFI's Internet publication, stated: "Had the ICFI not survived the crisis of 1985-86, there would not exist an *international* politically unified revolutionary Marxist party in the world today."

If it was no coincidence that Halil and his co-thinkers crossed paths with the ICFI, it is likewise no coincidence that the Greek renegades who supported the WRP in the 1985-1986 split crossed paths in the 2000s with the Turkish Pabloites with whom Halil had collaborated earlier on. These elements call today to "refound the Fourth International" in alliance with Stalinist tendencies. They have for decades been trying to prevent the construction of a revolutionary Marxist party, that is, of a section of the ICFI, in Turkey, in Greece and beyond.

The complete break of Halil and his comrades from these elements and the establishment of the Socialist Equality Group as the Turkish sympathizing organization of the ICFI was the result of the defense of the following political principles against Pabloite revisionism:

- 1) the revolutionary role of the international working class and the continuity of the Fourth International
- 2) the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism
- 3) the reactionary anti-working class role of the trade union bureaucracy
- 4) the defense of the Theory of Permanent Revolution.

The struggle for the political independence of the working class and the training of cadre on these principles were the heart of Comrade Halil's work. Unlike opportunists who chase passing tactical interests, Halil worked tirelessly to bring the history of the Fourth International and of critical strategic experiences of the working class into Turkey and facilitate their assimilation by the cadre.

Halil translated essential works, especially *The Heritage We Defend*, into Turkish. His translations, such as *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*, which are still published after his death, are critical to the struggle for Trotskyism. Comrade Halil played the leading role in creating political materials, documents and articles in the Turkish edition of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and above all, the books published by Mehring Yay?nc?l?k.

Today, all kinds of pseudo-left tendencies, representing the interests of the affluent middle class, have lined up with imperialist wars in the Middle East and bourgeois parties in Turkey. Some Pabloite elements call to found an "international" with Stalinists closely linked to the Russian state.

Only the political tendency led by comrade Halil continues an uncompromising struggle to build the Turkish section of the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Trotsky, in a struggle for the political independence of the working class. To build this movement, it is essential to arm new generations of revolutionaries with the historical and international foundations of a Trotskyist perspective.

This book contains articles written in memory of Comrade Halil after he passed away, as well as selected articles and political statements that he wrote after 2007.

This collection of Comrade Halil's writings shows his commitment to developing the political independence of the working class, to Trotskyism and the struggle for the world socialist revolution. Written on the most important developments in Turkey and the Middle East from 2007 to the end of 2018, these articles will not only present Comrade Halil's political record, but also enable readers to look at these critical events from a revolutionary and internationalist, that is, Trotskyist perspective.

Comrade Halil, in his article titled "The Litmus Paper of Centrism: Internationalism," written at the end of 2012, defended the ICFI against the two petty-bourgeois tendencies in Turkey who called for the building of a "Fifth International," distorting the history of the Fourth International. These tendencies were Marksist Tutum and Marksist Bak?? (it became the Socialist Laborers Party, a section of the newly-founded Pabloite International Socialist League). Halil emphasized that the ICFI embodied the continuity of the Fourth International:

Once again, we remind those who have united in their efforts to defame and trivialize Trotskyism that the ICFI is the only organization that continues its struggle to develop an international workers' movement based on Marxism against the bourgeoisie and all kinds of petty-bourgeois tendencies, and seeks to spread the "revolutionary Marxist tradition to every corner of the world."

The defense of Trotskyism and the ICFI by Halil and his supporters was an integral part of the struggle to mobilize the working class in the Middle East, based on an international socialist program, against imperialist war and all pro-imperialist bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies.

Halil insisted that the so-called "peace process" between the Turkish state and the Kurdish nationalist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), launched in 2009, was essentially a "peace" process between the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisies, under the auspices of the US and other imperialist powers, against the working people of the Middle East. This so-called "peace" was an integral part of the imperialist plunder in the Middle East, and the product of forces hostile to the social aspirations of workers in the region and internationally.

In March 2013, when negotiations between then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government and Kurdish nationalist leader Abdullah Öcalan reached the highest level, and Öcalan's letter was read at the Newroz Festival in overwhelmingly Kurdish city of Diyarbak?r, Comrade Halil wrote:

This process is not limited to Turkey, but is being developed entirely subject to the demands of global capital and in line with the interests of the US-led Western imperialist coalition. ... Öcalan's Newroz message clearly reveals that the Kurdish movement under his leadership has not only subordinated its own fate to the interests of the Kurdish bourgeoisie, but also intends to embark on expansionist adventures in the Middle East together with the big Turkish bourgeoisie.

As it turned out later, these "expansionist adventures" included targeting northern Syria as part of the US-backed war for regime change against President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. However, the fact that US imperialism made Syrian Kurdish YPG militias in Syria its main proxy force in this war not only ended the so-called "peace process." It also drove relations between Ankara and its imperialist NATO allies to the breaking point.

These conflicts culminated in the NATO-backed military coup in 2016 aiming at overthrowing Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Comrade Halil had already warned of the danger of a coup, in an article evaluating a report published by the US Bipartisan Policy Center in April 2015. The report declared Turkey an "increasingly undependable ally" and the PKK/PYD a "viable partner." Comrade Halil wrote:

...we can see that one of the main reasons why imperialist powers try to keep the AKP government in line by declaring it undependable, or to "get rid of" it if possible, is that it ignores or at least underestimates the global campaign by US and EU imperialism against Russia and China.

The April 2017 constitutional referendum, on the granting of extraordinary powers to the president, represented a turning point not only in the Turkish bourgeoisie's drive to dictatorship and war, but in the intensifying collaboration between the ICFI and Comrade Halil and his supporters.

At that time, his organization called itself Toplumsal E?itlik (Social Equality). It prepared a statement that was the product of intense discussions with the ICFI, and this statement was published on the *World Socialist Web Site* on behalf of the group. This statement, which dealt with critical international and historical issues based on the referendum agenda, represented significant progress towards the building of a section of the

ICFI in Turkey.

The statement, drafted by Comrade Halil, called for a “no” vote, exposing the reactionary orientation of the Erdogan government and the pro-imperialist, anti-working class character of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties in the official opposition that emerged against him. It explained that the only way forward was to build a revolutionary leadership within the working class and mobilize it in the struggle for the international socialist revolution:

The fundamental question is the building of a revolutionary party in each country to lead the working class to overthrow capitalism and establish a workers’ government pursuing socialist policies. The political and theoretical basis of this struggle, as of the October Revolution in Russia, is Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution.

The ICFI is the only political tendency that has for decades since its foundation fought to advance and defend the perspective of Permanent Revolution, in opposition to all petty-bourgeois opponents of Trotskyism, as the continuator of Marxism. The construction of a revolutionary leadership of the working class means building a Socialist Equality Party, a section of the ICFI, in Turkey and in every country.

The last article Comrade Halil wrote before succumbing to cancer was a message to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International. In his last article, he emphasized the necessity of responding to the surge of class struggle internationally with the building of the ICFI all over the world:

Just as it is inevitable that the resurgence of class struggles around the world will bring with it mass revolutionary working class struggles, as we recently witnessed in Egypt, it is equally clear that in order for these struggles to lead to successful socialist revolutions, it is necessary to build the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country.

The following call made by Comrade Halil in September 2018 continues to be relevant:

In conditions where all pseudo-left tendencies are openly integrated with the capitalist system and bourgeois parties, it is high time for workers and young people who are looking for a way forward to take action and join in the building of the ICFI and the struggle for socialism.

The greatest tribute to Comrade Halil will be to realize his cherished goal of establishing Sosyalist Eşitlik as the Turkish section of the ICFI. He understood that founding the Socialist Equality Party in Turkey required cultivating in this land the ineradicable roots of the ICFI and of Trotskyism. Despite his untimely death, his unfinished work will be completed, and Halil Çelik will always be remembered an intransigent fighter for socialism.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:



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