

# Historical issues arising from the Stalinist Turkish Communist Party's mass meeting in Ankara

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The Stalinist Turkish Communist Party (TKP) held a large gathering titled “TKP is challenging!” at the Congressum Congress Center in Ankara on Sunday, February 1. The 3,000-person hall was full, while hundreds more watched the event on screens outside the hall.

The broad participation of young people and workers reflects their demand for a left-wing alternative to the right-wing capitalist politics represented by the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), which many middle-class political tendencies line up behind. The TKP's “anti-imperialist” and “independent” political rhetoric plays a role in this. Therefore, the critical issues raised by the event should be subjected to Marxist criticism and political illusions about the TKP should be seriously addressed.

The event began with the singing of the “International” anthem, followed by a summary of the TKP's “own” history. Leading party member Aydemir Güler said of the TKP's founding in Baku as the Turkish section of the Communist International in 1920, when Türkiye was occupied by imperialist powers and their proxies after World War I: “The Great October Revolution of 1917 proved that socialism could take power, replacing the impotence of social democracy, which had been driven into chaos by the outbreak of the war of division [World War I] and was unable to respond to the crisis.”

He continued: “The Bolsheviks removed Russia from being one of the occupiers dividing up Anatolia. The Bolsheviks revealed the secret agreements and plans of the imperialists. They officially threw them in the trash. Bolshevism was a helping hand in every corner of Anatolia.”

Although Güler did not give any names, the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, in which the imperialist powers sought to divide up Ottoman territories, was revealed by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the October Revolution alongside Vladimir Lenin and the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs at the time.

Güler then added:

The Turkish Communist Party was founded with great ambition at a crossroads where old programs, old theses, and old parties had collapsed. At this crossroads, the national struggle in Ankara coincided with [TKP leader] Mustafa Suphi and his comrades' assertion that national liberation would be completed through social liberation.

The interests of Soviet Russia, as the first workers' power, coincided with those of the national resistance against imperialism [in Türkiye]. This coincidence actually saved the Bolsheviks' power in [Russia], where the civil war, which was essentially an imperialist attack, was raging. This coincidence gave Türkiye,

which imperialism was trying to strangle, a new future.

While these assessments are generally correct, they raise questions about why the TKP increasingly became a “left” supporter of the new bourgeois national Kemalist regime after the victory of the national liberation war in 1922 and the establishment of the Republic in 1923, abandoning its political independence and replacing the goal of a “republic of workers' and peasants' councils” with a program of “two stage” revolution.

## Şefik Hüsnü and Stalin's class-collaborationist line

In this shift, former TKP General Secretary Şefik Hüsnü (1887-1959), praised during the February 1 event, where he was recreated as an AI avatar, played a critical role. As stated in the *Historical and International Foundations of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal*:

In April 1923, one of the leaders of the TKP, Şefik Hüsnü, who represented the tendency towards class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, stated that three main tendencies were now possible in the country: 1) the Kemalist tendency, “represented by those who made the present revolution and are determined to keep it alive,” 2) the reactionary tendency, tied to feudalism and the monarchy, and 3) the socialist tendency, which aimed to deepen the revolution for the benefit of the poor masses of workers and peasants and the middle classes and complete it with a social revolution based on common property. Hüsnü argued that the Kemalist government and the socialists should act “hand in hand for a long time” against “reaction” and “confront the evil forces as a single body.”<sup>[1]</sup>

However, the decisive factor in the dominance of a class-collaborationist political line throughout the rest of the TKP's history was the world-historical struggle that began in the Soviet Union in 1923.

In this struggle, Joseph Stalin emerged as the main political representative of the bureaucratic caste that was growing and usurping power from the working class, while Trotsky, who led the founding of the Left Opposition in 1923, would become the main representative of the historical interests of the Soviet and international proletariat.

The adoption of the nationalist theory of “socialism in one country,” put

forward by Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin in 1924, led to the Comintern ceasing to be the leadership of the world socialist revolution and becoming a pragmatic tool of Soviet foreign policy.

This was opposed by the Left Opposition, which defended the strategy of world socialist revolution that had guided the October Revolution of 1917, led by Lenin and Trotsky, which the TKP claimed to embrace. The theoretical basis for this was Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution.

The "short history" of the TKP presented at the event completely ignores this decisive struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism and its consequences, which would have a decisive impact on the subsequent history of the communist movement and the working class in Türkiye and internationally.

Şefik Hüsnü justified the alliance with the Ankara government by attributing a progressive role to Kemalism and the national bourgeoisie against imperialism. In an article written in April 1926, he argued:

The working masses must recognize that the economic efforts of the Kemalist bourgeoisie effectively blocked the entry of imperialist capitalism into the country and thus had a progressive character, but they must also understand that the internal mechanisms of this economic development weighed heavily on their shoulders and that they themselves paid the price for the operation of these mechanisms. As long as the system implemented by the nationalist bourgeoisie plays an anti-imperialist role, it is essentially acceptable to the working masses.

This perspective, adopted by the Comintern under Stalin, would not only politically subordinate the TKP to the bourgeoisie and the state in Turkey but would also form the political basis for the defeat of the 1925-1927 Chinese Revolution and countless revolutionary struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial world in the following decades. As Trotsky wrote in May 1927 against Stalin's policy of subordinating the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang:

It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without. ... The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict.<sup>[3]</sup>

Trotsky demonstrated that the political line formulated in Stalin's theses, which led the Chinese Revolution to disaster, was essentially a continuation of the old Menshevik policy. Then he explained the difference between the Menshevik and Bolshevik ways as follows:

... the policy of Menshevism in the revolution consists of retaining the united front at any cost, as long as possible, at the price of adapting its own policy to the policy of the bourgeoisie, at the price of cutting down the slogans and the activity of the masses, and even, as in China, at the price of the organizational subordination of the workers' party to the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The Bolshevik way, however, consists of an unconditional political and organizational demarcation from the bourgeoisie, of a relentless exposure of the bourgeoisie from the very first steps of the revolution, of a destruction of all petty-bourgeois illusions about the united front with the bourgeoisie, of

tireless struggle with the bourgeoisie for the leadership of the masses, of the merciless expulsion from the Communist Party of all those elements who sow vain hopes in the bourgeoisie or idealize them.<sup>[4]</sup>

In his Theory of Permanent Revolution, Trotsky explained that in countries with belated capitalist development, such as Turkey and China, the bourgeoisie was incapable of fulfilling the tasks of the democratic revolution. These tasks could only be resolved under the leadership of the proletariat and as part of the international socialist revolution. As Trotsky wrote in 1929:

With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.<sup>[5]</sup>

He added:

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state... The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the mid-1930s, despite the relentless persecution of the Kemalist regime, the TKP developed as a powerful political tendency within the working class. Meanwhile, the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union had decided on "decentralization" in order to strengthen its relations with Ankara, effectively liquidating the party and openly supporting the Kemalist government. This was part of the adoption of the "Popular Front" program at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, which would subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie on an international scale.

### **Şmail Bilen and Stalin's counterrevolutionary terror**

Another figure recreated by artificial intelligence and glorified at the TKP's February 1 event was Şmail Bilen (1902-1983), who served as the party's general secretary between 1973 and 1983. Bilen led the TKP, which resumed illegal political activity in Türkiye in the 1970s, in supporting the CHP in the 1973 and 1977 elections under the name of the "national democratic front."

The particularly sinister nature of the TKP's embrace of Bilen is underscored by the fact that he served as a reliable servant of the Stalinist regime during and after the Moscow Trials, a period in which hundreds of thousands of socialists, including countless leaders of the October Revolution and the Civil War, were murdered in the Soviet Union. As noted in a study on Bilen:

Şmail Bilen, who embraced the party's new direction [in 1935], assumed high-level responsibility for activities during this period. After Şefik Hüsnü and Reşat Fuat left Moscow in April 1937, Bilen arrived in Moscow in early May and became the TKP's representative to the Comintern from August 1937 onwards.<sup>[7]</sup>

This is consistent with the TKP being an anti-Trotskyist party that defends Stalin's crimes and betrayals, including the political genocide in the Soviet Union and Trotsky's assassination in 1940, just like its sister organization in Greece, the Stalinist Communist Party (KKE). The TKP's publishing house prints books by the pseudo-historian Grover Furr, which reproduce the Stalinist lies of the 1930s.

In 1937, Trotsky wrote that the lies of the Stalinists served as "the fundamental ideological cement of the bureaucracy," adding:

The more irreconcilable becomes the contradiction between the bureaucracy and the people, all the ruder becomes the lie, all the more brazenly is it converted into criminal falsification and judicial frame-up. Whoever has not understood this inner dialectic of the Stalinist regime will likewise fail to understand the Moscow trials.<sup>[8]</sup>

Trotsky explained that the bureaucracy could not overcome either this contradiction or the contradiction between the existence of a capitalist world economy and the nationalist-autarkic economy of the USSR. There were two paths: Either the Stalinist bureaucracy would commit its final betrayal of the October Revolution by dissolving the Soviet Union and restoring capitalism, or the Soviet working class would retake power through a political revolution and return the Soviet Union to the path of the unfinished international socialist revolution.

The victory of the former cannot be understood without grasping the Stalinist bureaucracy's physical extermination of socialists through the Great Terror of the 1930s and its relentless war against the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement that defended the program of the October Revolution.

After World War II, the pro-Stalinist, liquidationist Pabloite tendency that emerged within the Fourth International played the role of an auxiliary to Moscow and world imperialism. The founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953 ensured the continuity of the Trotskyist movement through an uninterrupted struggle based on revolutionary internationalist principles against Stalinism, social democracy, Pabloism, and bourgeois nationalism.

The establishment of the Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi in Türkiye last year as a section of the ICFI was a product of this international and historical struggle.

### Mikhail Gorbachev and the restoration of capitalism

There was another person whose speech and likeness was animated by artificial intelligence at the TKP event in Ankara: Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader and liquidator of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the USSR. The TKP leaders had the audience boo Gorbachev, who was made to say the following:

Since 1985, I have made revolutionary speeches in the name of reviving the Soviet Union, which was plagued by numerous problems. I spoke about returning to Lenin. I even lied to gain the support of the party and the people... What I called *perestroika* was not a reform, but a liquidation... When the Soviet Union was dissolved, I said it was a historical necessity. I lied again. History did not force it. I abandoned it. I did not defend it. I surrendered it. And today, amid the ruins that remain, I acknowledge that this destruction was not an accident, but a change of direction amounting to betrayal.

The TKP, which today accuses Gorbachev of treason, conceals the fact that *Gelenek* magazine, the political tendency on which it is based, provided political support for this betrayal, just like other Stalinist tendencies around the world. Kemal Okuyan, who is now the general secretary of the TKP, wrote under the pseudonym Cemal Hekimoğlu in July 1987, in an article titled "Gorbachev and the Left," declaring that "the Gorbachev era... is a deadly necessity." He continued:

What does the Gorbachev era mean?

The USSR is currently engaged in an internal effort to consolidate its authority and prestige within the international socialist movement. Problems within its own internal dynamics have come to the fore for resolution at a time when the wave of world revolution has receded. These internal problems are the problems of *mature socialism*. The problems of mature socialism, however, are at a stage where socialism will now need a popular form of expression. Seventy years have passed [since the October Revolution]. Now there is a Marxism that emphasizes the "masses" and the "people." ...

Last May, Gorbachev emphatically stressed that "there is *no center that makes decisions* in the world revolutionary movement." He said, "This logic has begun to harm us and our friends." The Soviet Union had very complex relationships in various countries. In these relationships, they had no intention of making commitments on behalf of anyone, nor of engaging socialists in that country in certain policies...

We mentioned this gap, this void, this necessary space. In this sense, Mikhail Sergeyevich's [Gorbachev] speech is a ray of hope. The processes experienced by the USSR in its domestic and foreign policies should not leave their mark everywhere. Today, if the world socialist movement does not want to face an "existence" problem, it must *preserve and embrace* this gap—this space. *Socialists in capitalist countries, while understanding that the Gorbachev era is a deadly necessity for real socialism, should not cast Gorbachev as a shadow over their own problems and perspectives.* [Emphasis in original]<sup>[9]</sup>

In contrast, the ICFI, which based itself on a Trotskyist analysis and perspective, was the only international political tendency to oppose the counterrevolutionary policies of the Stalinist regime led by Gorbachev, and the Pabloites who applauded him for the Soviet bureaucracy's alleged "self-reform", policies that led to the breakup of the USSR. In its 1987 statement *What Is Happening in the USSR? Gorbachev and the Crisis of Stalinism*, the ICFI warned:

For both the working class in the Soviet Union and the workers and oppressed masses internationally, the so-called reform policy

of Gorbachev represents a sinister threat. It jeopardizes the historic conquests of the October Revolution and is bound up with a deepening of the bureaucracy's counterrevolutionary collaboration with imperialism on a world scale.<sup>[10]</sup>

The ICFI continued to develop its analysis of the Gorbachev regime. In 1989, David North, then national secretary of the Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, wrote in the *Perestroika versus Socialism: Stalinism and the Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR*:

The foreign policy of the Soviet government, like that of all other regimes in the world, arises organically out of the material interests of the ruling social elite, and, therefore, is a continuation of its domestic policy. Indeed, it is in the sphere of foreign policy that the fundamental interests and historic aims of the bureaucracy find their most concentrated and clear-cut expression. From this objective standpoint, the foreign policy of Mikhail Gorbachev is inseparably linked with the program of capitalist restoration that is being pursued by the Stalinist bureaucracy under the banner of perestroika. While the bureaucracy seeks to systematically undermine the state property relations within the Soviet Union, its foreign policy is aimed at integrating the USSR economically into the structure of world capitalism and its international division of labor.<sup>[11]</sup>

He continued:

The perspective of world socialist revolution proclaimed by the Bolsheviks in 1917 was long ago abandoned by the leadership of the Soviet Union... The emergence of the bureaucracy as a politically-conscious social tendency hostile to the Soviet proletariat found its initial expression as early as 1924 in the repudiation of the essential link, upon which Lenin had always insisted, between the development of socialism within the USSR and the victory of the international proletariat over world imperialism.<sup>[12]</sup>

### Workers and young people: turn to Trotskyism and the ICFI!

The Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the USSR had devastating political consequences that continue to this day on a global scale. It plunged both Soviet workers and the working class internationally into a major social regression, paving the way for the expansion of US-NATO imperialism towards the East and the escalation of anti-Russian aggression that provoked the war in Ukraine in 2022. In the absence of the USSR, the Middle East became the scene of almost uninterrupted imperialist aggression and war led by the United States since 1990-91.

Moreover, the identification of socialism with Stalinism by both the Soviet bureaucracy and imperialist powers throughout the twentieth century led to great political confusion and demoralization within the international working class during the post-Soviet period, which played a critical role in suppressing the class struggle. The importance of the ICFI's relentless struggle to defend historical truth against the Post-Soviet

School of Historical Falsification lies here.

The historical issues raised by the TKP's February 1 event in Ankara underscore the burning relevance of the struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism. The working class is today facing the violent return of the unresolved questions of the twentieth century: imperialist war, fascism and dictatorship, and social counterrevolution. These represent the bourgeoisie's responses to the insoluble contradictions of the capitalist system. But the same contradictions are radicalizing the working class and youth globally and preparing the ground for social revolution. The question is not whether revolutionary explosions will occur, but whether revolutionary leadership can guide them.

Such a leadership can only be built by assimilating the lessons of Trotskyism's decades-long historical struggle against Stalinism and all anti-Marxist petty-bourgeois tendencies, based on the strategy of Permanent Revolution and world socialist revolution. This leadership is the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties affiliated to it.

The Marxism of the 21st century is Trotskyism. Those who genuinely seek an independent, revolutionary, and anti-imperialist alternative to the capitalist establishment should study the *Historical and International Foundations of the Sosyalist E'tilik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal*, contact us to participate in our educational work, and join the struggle to build this leadership.

The Historical and International Foundations of the Sosyalist E'tilik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal. URL: <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/foundations-turkey/03.html> [2] B. Ferdi [?efik Hüsni], "Türkiye'nin Ekonomik ve Mali Durumu", April 16, 1926, in *Komintern Belgelerinde Türkiye*, ed. Do?u Perinçek (?stanbul: Kaynak Yay?nlar?, 2020), pp. 380-381.

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[1] The Historical and International Foundations of the Sosyalist E'tilik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal. URL: <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/foundations-turkey/03.html> [2] B. Ferdi [?efik Hüsni], "Türkiye'nin Ekonomik ve Mali Durumu", April 16, 1926, in *Komintern Belgelerinde Türkiye*, ed. Do?u Perinçek (?stanbul: Kaynak Yay?nlar?, 2020), pp. 380-381.

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- [5] Leon Trotsky, “What is the Permanent Revolution?”, in *The Permanent Revolution*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/perman.htm>
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Burak Gürel, “?smail Bilen: Gecikmi? Yükseli?ten H?zland?r?lm?? Çökü?e TKP”, in *Türkiye Solundan Portreler* (Ankara: Dipnot Yay?nlar?, 2015), haz?rlayanlar: Emir Ali Türkmen & Ümit Özger, p. 239.
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- [10] International Committee of the Fourth International, *What is Happening in the USSR? Gorbachev and the Crisis of Stalinism*, March 1983, <http://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/fi-14-2/03.html>
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