



Opening Speech

General Secretary Kemal Okuyan on behalf of TKP Central Committee

October 20th, 2023

Dear comrades,

Four years later, we are once again in Izmir. On behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkey and its members, I would like to welcome you all. I hope that the 23rd International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, which we inaugurated today, will be fruitful, sincere and productive, building upon the success of the 22nd meeting we held in Havana last year, with the great contributions of our Cuban comrades.

Dear comrades, dear press workers,

On October 7th, after the raid on Israel by Palestinian resistance fighters and the subsequently increasing Israeli aggression, the Israeli Ambassador thanked the Turkish people. What was it that we deserved this gratitude? Erdogan, who had previously thundered at Israel at every opportunity, used a very soft language this time and called for moderation. However, the Israeli ambassador was not talking about the Turkish government, but about its people. He was saying "thank you" because in Turkey, which is known for the widespread sympathy towards the Palestinian resistance in the country, there has been a radical increase in the number of those who stand with Israel, and even some leftist sections uttered views opposing the Palestinian resistance under the pretext of condemning Hamas.

First of all, I would like to salute the legitimate and righteous resistance of the Palestinian people and emphasize that we demand an immediate end to the Israeli occupation and aggression. Our meeting is just beginning, but I think there is no doubt that these words are the common attitude of all fraternal parties present here. Our revolutionary will and our hearts are with the people of Palestine.

Let me return to the issue of the gratitude of the Israeli Ambassador. On October 7th, a manipulative perception management operation was carried out that affected a large section of the Turkish society. In an extremely systematic manner, they overshadowed the Palestinian question, brought Hamas to the forefront and by using part real part fake images, created an impression that the question stemmed from "the slaughter of modern Israelis by barbaric jihadists".

Communist Party of Turkey's assessment of Hamas is very clear. We have no doubts concerning the ideological origins, mission, goals and international connections of this organization. Nevertheless, on 7 October, the Communist Party of Turkey quickly declared that the Palestinian resistance was legitimate and, intervened to dispel the confusion in people's minds and we were able to counter the imperialist propaganda to a certain extent.

Dear comrades,



We face two problems here. One of them is the problem related to our channels of addressing the society and the workers, which is one of the topics of our meeting agenda. In a moment, I will come to issues such as the media, the field of ideological struggle that affects the preferences of the masses, and news broadcasting, and so forth. However, right now I would like to touch upon another problem related to the developments in Palestine.

It is the problem of political Islam. Comrades, I will be frank, political Islam is one of the topics where there is the most widespread confusion among the communist parties. Marxism was born in Europe, it developed there. Although the Russian Revolution was in some ways a challenge to European Marxism, the Bolsheviks always had a western character. This is natural because Europe was the continent where the working class was the most developed in quantitative and qualitative terms.

The question of religion has not been a burning issue for Marxism as a result of centuries of struggle and reforms which undermined the influence of the church. Although in some Catholic countries the economic, ideological and political influence of the church is high, Christianity has never become the dominant political agenda for communists.

In the Islamic world, the situation is completely different. Political Islam and the struggle for secularism against it has been one of the most important issues. This is not a preference, but a must. Since political Islam has become an internal phenomenon all over the world, especially in Europe, it is time to discuss this issue in detail.

Political Islam, in all its variants, is the claim to design the society, public sphere, state and politics according to religious rules. In the face of this claim, there can be no positioning other than the defense of secularism. This is the essence of the issue. Communist parties should take into account that this issue has nothing to do with the respect for individual beliefs. For example, TKP, on the one hand, is recruiting workers with faith into its ranks, and on the other hand, it is raising the struggle for secularism in the harshest and sharpest way.

The struggle against political Islam is a class issue from top to bottom. Because today, political Islam has turned into an effective tool in the hands of the ruling classes not only to attack, divide or control the workers but also to gain advantage in the competition within the imperialist system.

When its class-based characteristics is missed, in Europe and North America, political Islam is either viewed with an orientalist approach as "an anti-imperialist, even revolutionary revolt of the backward world", or, as in the case of ISIS, as a medieval barbarism.

I regret to say that both approaches lead us to mistakes. It must be recognized that political Islam is an important reality of the modern world, it is fundamentally a class phenomenon and a problem that cannot be overcome by romanticism or feelings of terror.

We will not allow the Palestinian resistance to be reduced to Hamas. But we need to answer the question why religion has become decisive in social dynamics of the Islamic world.

Comrades, the regression in the Middle East is ultimately due to the same reason as the decline of the working-class movement in the rest of the world today. This reason can be



summarized as the abandonment of the class positions and the perspective of revolution. One of the most important, if not the only, reasons for the rise of right-wing populism or the far right in Europe today is the gaps left by the left. Capitalism constantly generates problems that require radical responses. The same mechanism is also at work in the Middle East, which has a very different historical, cultural and political background. Politics does not tolerate any gaps. The truth is that they are stealing the anger of the poor and they are stealing it from us.

We cannot accept this. The moment we put aside the actuality of the revolution; we commit mistakes. Anti-US positions without the goal of socialism leads us to consider political Islam or the so-called national bourgeoisies as allies; putting democracy before socialism often leads us to co-operate with the US or the EU or other bourgeois forces. This is a vicious circle.

This vicious circle traps us in Europe, Latin America or North America as much as it does in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Egypt or Palestine.

These traps are so effective that some of the forces that openly and physically, not only ideologically, collaborate with the USA are treated as "national liberation movements", and Erdogan, the leader who represents a 20-year darkness for the working class of Turkey, labeled as "anti-imperialist".

However, Marxism-Leninism rejects such fragmented approaches. Yes, there are complex, multi-layered dynamics in today's world. But when we put the class contradiction at the core, when we act with the presupposition that there can be no strategic orientation other than a socialist revolutionary perspective in the 21st century, when we close the door to any temporary or permanent cooperation with the bourgeois class, when we take an unambiguous and clear position on secularism and anti-imperialism, the communist movement will eventually be strengthened in the international arena and even become a hegemonic power. This is our point of view.

Dear comrades,

We think that we have a similar problem on the war in Ukraine today. We are aware that this issue has created deep splits among the communist parties and as the host party we do not intend to focus on these splits nor widen them. Our party has already shared its views with you and the public through statements, signatures, and contributions to other joint texts.

On the other hand, I have to sincerely say that in a region where socialism has marked an entire century not only as a strong option but also as a real process of social construction, we are unhappy with the fact that the positions of the communists today are stuck in the national rather than the class-centered position.

Dear comrades,

Of course, this does not mean that we over-simplify the problems. We are facing complex problems all over the world. This complexity requires a principled, revolutionary stance as well as political mastery. But there is only one thing we know: Communists must act by putting their historical mission at the core: The struggle for democracy, peace, independence,



anti-imperialism only gains meaning when it is linked to that specific historical mission. This issue cannot be postponed to a period when more favorable conditions would emerge. In this context, we need to remember that more favorable conditions will never come.

The slogan, “socialism or barbarism” was very meaningful a hundred years ago. A hundred years later, we cannot allow barbarism to stand as the only option, without an alternative. Capitalism is barbarism in all its forms and in absolute terms, and any strategy aimed at gaining positions within capitalism is doomed to failure. The only effective strategy today is the perspective of socialist revolution and any positions and current gains must be defined in accordance with that strategy.

In this way we can break free from the shadow of bourgeois parliamentarism or nationalism or political Islam or EU funds or middle-class ideology. In this way, the humanity will not have to choose between Biden vs. Trump, Hamas vs. Zionism, Zelenskiy vs. Putin, the Mullah regime vs. the USA, Erdoğan vs. the pro-Soros bourgeois opposition.

Comrades,

It would be unjust to attribute the decline in international responses to the decades of Israeli atrocities in Palestine exclusively to the reactionary ideological and political character of Hamas, which is well known to those in these parts of the world. Communists need to ponder more about the channels of information where speed and impact are increasingly important. In this respect, lagging behind has had and will continue to have great costs. We must recognize that one of the important reasons why we have difficulties in building a revolutionary strategy today is the enormous superiority of capitalism in the international arena in the ability of managing people’s perceptions.

Although our main weapon against this superiority is the organization of the working class, it is obvious that we are putting more and more numbers of young workers at the mercy of social media, Netflix and similar platforms, influencers and the popular culture.

We are talking about a constraint that reduces us to a bystander at all critical junctures. We experienced this during the wars in Yugoslavia and Iraq, then in Libya and especially in Syria, where they justified military interventions with contents produced in centers set up by the British in Istanbul and elsewhere. Today there is an open and disgusting attack on communism by the Ukrainian government and the US and NATO behind it. Anti-communism is also being perpetuated in Russia with very subtle methods. For example, in almost all of the films and TV series on the Second World War produced in Russia with the cooperation or support by the state institutions, military officials are portrayed as heroes, whereas party leaders or commissars are portrayed as selfish, cruel and abusive. We must recognize that this is more effective than open and crude anti-communism.

We can also give numerous examples from Turkey. We have to overcome the discrediting of communism by making it a strong alternative again, by getting rid of the uncanny shadows cast over it, by taking the information wars seriously, and by recognizing its relationship with intelligence, with our language, with our cultural production.



This problem is a priority issue and requires allocation of resources. This problem cannot be solved, neither by surrendering to new channels nor by resorting to cumbersome and archaic methods. This problem cannot be solved by efforts within our individual countries either, it has an international dimension. On this issue, TKP has preparations on a number of platforms and will share them with the parties that are interested in the issue and with whom we share a common perspective.

Comrades,

On 6 February, Turkey experienced a major earthquake that also affected Syria. Tens of thousands of our citizens died and some cities were almost completely destroyed. Immediately after the earthquake, TKP organized significant solidarity across the country, sending teams to the most affected settlements. In a way that the bourgeois media could not ignore, our party did and continues to do what the state should have done. Then an election took place and TKP received votes that were incomparably lower than its political influence not only at national level but also in the region of the earthquake. So much so that some forces other than us in the media accused the people of "disloyalty".

TKP, on the other hand, continued its work without any reproach. With patience and in line with its own strategy, it continued to organize in working-class neighborhoods dominated by conservative ideologies, and opened District houses and party offices. We acted and continue to act patiently, knowing that the fact that the impact we have created does not translate into votes is due to the working people's quest for and expectation of "immediate solutions". We would not exchange our organized power and political influence for millions of votes. This organization and influence sometimes do turn into votes and sometimes do not. But we want you to make sure of the following: After 80 years-ban, TKP has become an important reality of this country at the end of 20 years of struggle and we are continuing on our way.

Turkey is a country with a lot of difficulties for us. While our country, which has been taken as the outpost of US imperialism for years, maintains this characteristic, it is also gaining an imperial, neo-ottomanist character as a product of the expansionist needs of the rapidly strengthening Turkish bourgeoisie. The goals such as "democracy first", "the Kurdish question first", "the end of US dependence first", "the defeat of political Islam first", are all goals that cancel each other and hinder the independent development of the working-class movement. Moreover, we are witnessing once again the intensifying efforts to declare the Republic of Turkey, which was founded hundred years ago as an element of the revolutionary front, as the outcome of a bourgeois revolution, illegitimate. TKP is making efforts to carry the Republican heritage of the country to socialism on a completely anti-capitalist axis.

From now on, any radical change in Turkey will have only but a socialist character. We are certain of this. The cost of our unpreparedness when the conditions are ripe would be the victory of the counter-revolution. The history of Turkey is, in a way, a history of counterrevolutions; yet we also interpret this as a "gestation of the revolution" and we continue our struggle in line with our historical mission.

With the excitement of and hopes for this struggle, we friendly, fraternally, comradely greet you and warmly welcome you.



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