

**BIRIKIM  
YAYINCILIK  
KOLL. STI.**

X. Gus MA, Gerry, Ahmet R, USec Bureau  
21 MARS 1978

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Dear Ernst Mandel,

Thank you for your letter and your interest. The militant attitude and comradesly tone of your letter encouraged me to write longer, in order to tell more about Turkey and Birikim, to discuss certain matters, but above all to start a firm dialogue with you which I always regarded as very valuable.

I have told my friends in the publishing house to send all the numbers of Birikim that are available. We shall continue to send them new ones as they appear. From the authors of the translations you can gather the types of questions we emphasize and I want to sum up our basic attitude. I'm writing an article on the Turkish Left for the New Left Review which is half finished now and will probably appear in a short time. That article would give you an idea on the way my friends and I tend to view the revolutionary movement here.

I might have exaggerated the political necessity of keeping a distance towards Trotskyism in my letter. There is no question about making a secret of sources. When the Birikim numbers arrive, you will see, for instance an article by M. Löwy. In the March number you will see your own article on the meeting in Venice together with the other articles in the same number, Rossanda, Bettelheim, etc. The short article on Cheng Chao-lin will also appear in the March issue.

I decided to print these articles without asking for permission. To tell you the truth, I am rather fed up with the procedure of applying for permission of this kind to Marxists "in Europe". We have a good relationship with the NLR, but apart from that European Marxists can be quite finicky about inconceivable details. The important thing for me, of course, is that socialists in Turkey can read these things. So sometimes I take advantage of the isolation of Turkey and do as everyone else does in this country.

But it does also bother me to carry on pirating in this manner. That is why I wrote to Inprecor and have started writing to all other periodicals that I know of. I know that I won't receive any reply from most of them.

Turkish socialism really started after the sixties. Before that, there was the very inefficient TCP, one of the earliest in the Comintern but also one of least influence in its own country. Apart from their inefficiency in practice, they contributed almost nothing to the development of Marxist thought in Turkey, because of the great

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ideological concessions they made to Kemalism."

After the sixties, with the most democratic new constitution Turkey ever had, socialism made its belated entry into Turkish politics. For a long time it was a movement influential among students and intellectuals. In 1962 the Turkish Workers' Party was founded--outside the sphere of influence of the old TCP. It was founded by some trade-union leaders, but until the end they made their best to keep intellectuals and workers apart from one another so that it was a workers party only in name. At the same time, the remnants of TCP started a violent campaign of opposition to the party, advocating a strategy based on the possibility of a "progressive junta". At a time when the movement was very weak young and the cadres had very little Marxist consciousness, these people who represented the old Communist tradition made use of their prestige to deceive these cadres. Turkey being "a semi-feudal and semi-dependent" nation, we needed a National Democratic Revolution. Since there was no democracy, one could not think of a socialist party. We should wait until the soldiers made their junta and "granted" democracy and only after that we could have a party. Obviously, this was a guarantee to the Kemalist officers that the working class would be kept out of politics in return for what these "Communists" hoped to get out of the junta.

It is very difficult to give a coherent and intelligible explanation for such gross distortions--the article I mentioned may be a little step--but it worked and thousands of young men shouted slogans about being "hand in hand" with the "revolutionary army". Kemalism, the Bonapartist ideology of the monopolists and the bureaucracy, was presented as the last resting place on the way to Marxist consciousness. The dynamism of Turkish capitalism--and its implications concerning the proletariat--were ignored and the country presented as a stagnant, feudal society in order to agitate "patriotic officers".

Until 1967 I had kept out both groups. But when this campaign was started at that time, I ~~xxxxxx~~ decided to give up my qualms about TİP (the Workers' Party) and became a member. The Party was definitely pacifist in character. In the 1968 student rising, being an assistant in the university, I established contact with the students on my own initiative--the party had practically disappeared. In time, this pacifism led to conversion of all these students eager for action into militants of the National Democratic Revolution. The leaders there encouraged student action because it was a sure way of hastening the junta.

The working class in Istanbul made a great demonstration on 16 June 1970. After this it was rather difficult to shout "Workers and army hand in

hand" because the Army had no hand to offer to the workers, the hands being occupied in holding guns and bayonets. The NDR strategy collapsed, the young cadres having learnt the basic propositions of Marxist tradition by this time. The junta, however, was bound to come. What could these young militants do?

The international situation was not very encouraging. The Soviets said or offered nothing. China said "People's War" and this was adopted by a certain group within the NDR movement. But for the other militants, however glorious such a war may have been, it necessitated a long time of preparation, etc. Thank God--or dialectical materialism--the working class was there, not sleeping. But there was no point of contact between the two movements. If something could be done, perhaps the workers would also follow. But what was to be done? "Decisive" was identified with "armed"--in the present conjuncture these militants chose Latin America and shortly afterwards the "urban guerilla" of L. America. It was "armed", short and influential, had promising potential of advertisement ("armed propaganda"), etc. So, guerilla activism and the expected junta came at the same time. The cadres who for years had fought to quicken the junta were now fighting against it but they were still retaining a lot of ambiguous elements in their minds about the military. Surely there were some "radical officers" somewhere, waiting to intervene.

During the period that we refer to as the 12th of March, all the Left was defeated. The main group that carried on the urban guerilla, THKP (Party and Front of Turkish People's Liberation), changed or tried to change its strategy after the foremost leaders were caught and arrested. From "urban guerilla", with distant hopes for a People's War, but with very real links with the juntas, they decided to return to Leninism: What this meant in practice was, stopping the desperate guerilla actions going deep underground, finding jobs for the militants searched by the police, such as opening grocery stores, etc. in relatively isolated areas, and preserving the relations with the workers. I got involved in this movement.

I had been in England in 1969-70. By this time HİP had collapsed and the NDR was about to collapse. While in England I also had read about guerilla and decided it was quite impossible. So, on my return, I was quite bewildered. I wanted to do something, but how was this going to be possible? I could keep calm enough not to get engaged in something I did not believe in. When I heard of the change in THKP and my help was asked, I accepted.

We did not survive for long. It was all very, amateurish anyway. In March 1972 I was in jail together with everyone else. We came out with the amnesty in 1974. I did not consider myself a "member" of THKP, but from the legal point of view my personal belief did not change much. I did not consider myself as a political person either. But what I saw in prison changed me to a great extent. Some of the people who realized the stupidity of what they had done until then suffered violent pangs of conscience--some went out of their minds. The rest who for a long time defended the old positions ("the past of the movement", as they called it) were quite hysterical in their defense.

So when we unexpectedly came out (the results of the capitalistic development... A large and active working class, politicised masses, reaction towards the dictatorship, these and other factors brought Ecevit to power. Turkish society is full of paradoxes--we were the pretext for the 12th of March governments to stay in power: we need authority to wipe off Communism, etc. After the 1973 elections we became the "victims". The amnesty was the number one issue after that.) I and a few friends decided to publish a theoretical journal to fight against the old dogmas, to stress the importance of culture in socialist politics, to establish the critical attitude of Marxism, etc. We were very careful to keep on the theoretical level and not to get ourselves identified with any group. The particular situation of the Left in Turkey imposed on us the paradoxical position of a theoretical group deliberately keeping away from practice. I think the situation of Marxism in the world is also responsible. Really to return to Marx and Lenin one has to take one's distance towards all "real-socialistic" interpretations.

Our project worked quite well. In this way, what we said corresponded to what this or that group wanted to say. Usually they ignore a question when they feel unable to solve it. We did not offer solutions and pointed out the impossibility of "solutions in formulae". We intervened in certain major events. The first was our criticism of the pseudo-Marxist history thesis of a theoretician of the old school which was designed to justify the junta. Our criticism stopped the development of this current--the party that adopted it made a self-criticism.

We intervened in the Sino-Soviet debate at a time when the cadres in Turkey felt obliged to define themselves according to their attitude towards this conflict. We attacked the Chinese side more heavily because it presented itself as a way of transcending certain difficulties and the more militant cadres were inclined to be influenced. But we tried to show that the Chinese actually shared the economist problematic

of Stalinism and tried to overcome Sovietic determinism through ~~voluntarism~~ voluntarism. If one expected a whole people to be really conscious politically, one could not reach that goal through doping these masses with the aphorisms in a Red Book.

This intervention was also of some influence and gave theoretical support to those who intuitively or more consciously realized the necessity for keeping out of this strange polarization. Some were talking of the "Ho chi minh attitude", meaning that the conflict was not our issue. We pointed out the wrongness of this kind of neutralism and said that indeed it was our issue. But to make it really ours, the right way was not to identify oneself with either camp but see in Marxist terms what lay behind it, and how both camps were in fact distorting Marxism.

We criticised the guerilla movement, we criticised the Comintern conception of Fascism, we criticised the instrumentalist conception of the state. But the main emphasis was for some time on the concept of the Marxist Party. We maintained that socialism could not be reduced to the "struggle for power" or for "power as such". Here we introduced Gramsci--virtually unknown in Turkey--and dwelt on his notion of beginning to build socialist relations within the party and before coming to power, the revolutionary organization thus being a potential pre-figuring of the society we wanted to reach. Introducing the Manifesto writers on these questions we also warned against the historicistic blind alleys in Gramsci's epistemology and the possible marriage a la Macciocchi between Mao and Gramsci. Since last fall we are concentrating on Stalin, Sovietic societies, etc. Throughout these years we have influenced many people. The level of theoretical debate has risen, people are more careful in manipulating concepts, we have lots of enemies (the right ones), but also a lot of friends. The journal and some of the books have become part of the education system of some groups.

I meant to answer your questions on Trotskyism. But I have already written a very long letter. To repeat my complaints about "European Marxists", I always want to say a lot to them but hesitate for fear of boring them, taking their time, etc. This may be my Oriental complex of inferiority, but I must say that I had enough concrete justification for such fears. With you I felt very comfortable--hence my volubility. I shall write more if you wish me to, but now I must conclude.

I can read English and a little French. But we have several friends who can read German too. In fact, we are building a cadre for the translations quarterly now, so that almost any language is quite

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welcome if you send us material.

So it is settled that we exchange Birikim and the quarterly which we have not named yet (by the way, "birikim" means "accumulation") with Inprecor. But I have further questions. I mean to write to many other Trotskyist periodicals, such as Critique and Socialist Revolution. Can you help in our getting them? Should I mention my correspondence with Inprecor and with you in my letters? And, can you send a list of the periodicals I should get in touch with, because in this country it is very difficult to know what is published where.

With all these questions, I hope to hear from you soon (of course, we have to allow time for the people who read the letters in between. I don't care for that because I do not say anything in my letters which I wouldn't say if they came and asked me). I thank you again for your comradely attention.

Yours fraternally,



Murat Belge