

Reflections on a Translated History of the Turkish Communist Movement- Blog

By V.K. (from <https://100flowers.net/>)

Recently an English translation of a Chinese article analyzing the Turkish communist movement and its current divisions was made available online. The Turkish communist and Maoist guerrilla movements occupy a space of relative obscurity, even among Maoists. Here are a couple reflections on the article from the perspective of a US revolutionary, for its implications in our own struggle.

1. Existence of multiple revolutionary groups

"In both countries [Turkey and India], the founders also died shortly after the founding of the party, but in one case the party experienced a low ebb, the organization fell apart and but then was reborn; in the other case, the ideology was never truly unified, the organizations were scattered, and the scale of the struggle was also limited. However, the author would like to refute two popular arguments, that "the left is infinitely divisible" and that "the left is keen on infighting". Despite the shortcomings... of the Maoist movement in Turkey, they have persisted in their struggle for 50 years, have a certain mass base (many of them risked arrest to commemorate the martyrs and hold funerals for them), a large number of cadres, right up to the top members, are willing to sacrifice themselves but still remain determined. People overcame their own narrow nationalistic sentiments and demanded the right of self-determination for the Kurdish nation even more thoroughly than the Kurdish national movement. Doesn't all this show the resilience of the Maoist movement in Turkey and its strong communist stance? As the following analysis will also show, the differences between the four factions are not the result of petty or personal disputes, but of a series of major issues related to the revolutionary strategy. Another argument is to arbitrarily designate one of these factions as "correct" and "advanced", while other organizations are "pseudo parties" and traitors, and so on. However, in fact, the propagators of this argument cannot even explain clearly what the differences between the four factions are. They often base conclusions on make up their own imaginations and then draw sectarian conclusions, which is also extremely ridiculous. This style of random talk and arbitrary judgment is often slapped in the face by the facts."

The criticism of this attitude of some revolutionaries to arbitrarily assign labels to parties in other countries is also worth considering. While the differences between groups reflect real, and important, theoretical differences, too often the prospect of struggling for a greater unity has been cut short by arbitrary judgements of who was "correct" and who was just a "liberal/revisionist".

For comrades in Turkey, these questions are not ones to be treated hastily or lightly, but directly implicate life-or-death questions of the revolution and future of the ongoing armed struggle. Fortunately despite these differences in the Turkish movement there is still an effort by all revolutionary groups, there are organizations within which they work together, and even outside of these platforms there is a degree of camaraderie and alliance in carrying out the

revolutionary struggle, and starting point of unity offers a strong basis to struggle over differences with each other to find a stronger unity.

The US revolutionary movement is still quite small and disparate, and even smaller are the MLM forces. It is possible that we too will go through a period of multiple revolutionary organizations and parties existing simultaneously before a unified vanguard emerges, or go through cycles of unity-struggle-unity, merge-split-merge. There is already a history of this which we must learn from. The prevalence of opportunism throughout the history of the communist movement has often required revolutionary elements to split and chart a new course. Within some revolutionary circles (and not just among communists) it is quite commonplace to pass arbitrary judgement on different individuals or organizations, denounce them on sectarian grounds, to remain at a superficial level of engagement with political line (a tendency further reinforced by the prevalence of organizing taking place via social media which favors short-form engagement), etc. While line struggle is always necessary, and even splits and denunciations are necessary at times, when such an approach dominates it is a bad practice and can turn political divisions into ossified dogmas. Overall, our efforts should be to “practice Marxism and not revisionism; unite and don’t split; and be open and aboveboard, don’t intrigue and conspire.”

So far this shortcoming is mostly the result of the condition of our movement, operating for now as small, local circles and not as a national political movement with deep mass links. Examples around the world show this does not have to be a permanent condition, and can be changed through conscious effort. Yet as the experience in Turkey shows, it is not enough to be a national political movement with deep mass links, the struggle over political line shows itself as the determining factor at every stage and level of the revolutionary movement. For those of us in countries with far less developed revolutionary movements, this is a helpful reminder to not forgo the centrality of political line from the start.

2. National and class contradictions

The article draws attention to the importance of national contradictions in Turkey and the revolutionary movement, namely Turkish national oppression of Kurds and the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. This has been a key factor at multiple points in the development of the communist movement. One major reason Ibrahim Kaypakkaya founded the revolutionary Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML) was the denial by some existing organizations of this national oppression. On the contrary, the TKP/ML and the groups which would later emerge from it all took seriously the alliance between the working-class and the Kurdish national movement, starting with the defense of the right to self-determination. They regarded this movement as a natural ally of the proletariat, and this alliance continues to be a central aspect of the revolutionary movements of both the Turkish and Kurdish people.

The author writes, “People overcame their own narrow nationalistic sentiments and demanded the right of self-determination for the Kurdish nation even more thoroughly than the Kurdish national movement.”

How did the Maoist movement raise that demand more thoroughly than the national movement itself? They took the only genuinely internationalist position of the proletariat of an oppressing nation, that is to unequivocally demand the right of self-determination to those being oppressed by “their own” bourgeoisie.

The article points out that while the Maoist movement has stayed firm to this principle for over 50 years, the Kurdish movement gradually moved from fighting for right to self-determination to only fighting for “national autonomy” within the context of the Turkish state. The leadership of the Kurdish movement today insists on “democratic confederalism” (i.e. autonomy) and not the right to self-determination, as the solution. This difference alone is worth considerable attention. Yet despite this very important difference, all the Maoist organizations still support, praise, and collaborate with the Kurdish national movement. “The disagreement is not whether to form an alliance with the Kurdish national movement, but how to form an alliance.”

In the US as well, the class struggle here from the very beginning has been intertwined with the oppression of different nationalities, as the entire basis of the state emerged from settler-colonialist genocide of indigenous people and enslavement of Africans, as well as continued imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism around the world (as is most evident today by the ongoing US-Zionist genocide against Palestinians in Gaza). To this day, through a more elaborate liberal system of white supremacy, the right of self-determination in these lands has been exclusively reserved for the dominant, Euro-American “white” nationality.

However unlike the Turkish comrades who have held onto the banner of right to self-determination, in the US due to the lack of a continuity in the revolutionary movement and prevalence of opportunism, this principle has not been preserved as strongly as in the Turkish movement. The Communist movement in this country has been inconsistent: at times standing chauvinist and aloof from the struggles of oppressed nationalities, at times tailing behind bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces (replacing the demand with self-determination for the demand of equality), and at the best of times, a fierce advocate of self-determination and revolutionary unity, working closely with the progressive and revolutionary forces, forging alliances and providing leadership wherever possible. Advances in the revolutionary movement came alongside a strong alliance of the proletariat and the oppressed nationalities, most notably their efforts in the South after adopting the right of self-determination for Black Americans in 1928.

For the growth of a revolutionary movement and unity of the proletariat, we cannot drop the demand for the right to self-determination for *all* oppressed nationalities and the struggle against our own “narrow nationalist sentiments”; at the same time the historical positions of the Communist movement should be re-assessed and re-evaluated based on present conditions.

The author writes, “Revolutionaries must resolutely support the oppressed nation in its struggle against oppression. However, while supporting this kind of struggle and

establishing a united front with it, we should also pay attention to our own ideological and organizational independence.”

It should be remembered that to advocate for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination is not the same as advocating for creation of an independent state. It is simply demanding that nation be granted the democratic right to decide for themselves their political future, *including* the right to form a separate state. The revolutionary proletariat may have its own opinion on the matter based on what is most advantageous to the development of the class struggle and cause of socialism/communism, but at the end of the day the decision is in the hands of the oppressed nation itself and should be respected as a democratic decision. It is only by holding firm to this principle that genuine equality and unity can be fostered between nationalities, as the Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries demonstrate.