

BOOK REVIEWS

Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923, edited by Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. London and New York: British Academic press in association with The International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 1994, 222 pages.

At its peak in the late seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire extended from the gates of Vienna to the Arabian Sea and from the Caucasus mountain-chain to the borders of Morocco. Over thirty modern sovereign states in the post-Cold War world have had parts or all of their territory under direct Ottoman rule at one time or another. However, not all dominant ethnic and religious groups or ideological currents in these countries share today the same memories of their Ottoman past. In a geographical region where nationalism still reigns supreme in historiography and related scholarly disciplines, this has given rise to various and often contradictory interpretations of the empire's heritage. As Erik Jan Zürcher points out in his introduction to *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923*, "all too often late Ottoman history is treated not as the history of the last phase of a multinational empire, but as the prehistory of the nation-states which grew up on its ruins" (p.9). Serious attempts to overcome these nationalistic biases have, to-date, been extremely few and have, generally speaking, failed to make much headway.

The volume edited by E. J. Zürcher (University of Nijmegen) and Mete Tunçay (Istanbul), a leading expert on Turkey's old 'left', is an attempt to overcome the "narrow approaches that have hitherto prevailed", (p. 157), concentrating on the activities of Ottoman socialists from various non-Turkish communities during the last decades of the empire, which, says Tunçay, have previously been a *terra incognita* for historians. Thus, it is an extremely useful addition to Ottoman studies in general.

Its preparation, we are told, began in 1989, when the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam brought together seven specialists from six countries, under Tunçay's chairmanship, to share their existing individual know-how on the role of the ethnic and religious communities of the Ottoman Empire in the genesis and development of the socialist movement. They were first asked to define the project's goals and draw up a checklist of those points that should be considered. The projected contributors were then instructed to devote their attention to individual communities and provide a survey of the history of the socialist and communist movements within that specific community for the period 1876-1923. They were also asked to deal in particular with the relationships of those socialist groups with the Young

Turk movement (both in opposition and in power), Masonic organizations, revolutionary or radical groups and organizations established or operating abroad (specifically in the new nation-states of the Balkans), and other international socialist or radical currents, movements and organizations. One theme, however, says Zürcher, came to dominate all others during a second meeting in May 1992: the relationship between nationalism and socialism in the Ottoman communities. Hence, the eventual title of the volume produced, where - with the exception of Feroz Ahmad of Boston, who attempts to pose a number of pertinent questions and set the agenda - each contributor, devotes his attention to one specific Ottoman community. Fikret Adanir covers the Macedonians; Ibrahim Yalimov, the Bulgarians; Panagiotis Noutsos, the Greeks; Paul Dumont, the Jews of Salonica (modern-day Thessaloniki); and Anahide Ter Minassian, the Armenians. Finally, Tunçay himself tries to draw conclusions and link the developments within the different non-Muslim Ottoman communities to those in the Muslim ones. The articles are intended to serve both as a survey of existing knowledge and as a guide to archival and printed sources and publications. Unfortunately, not all contributors have strictly followed the above-mentioned guidelines. In addition, Tunçay himself expresses disappointment for not having found in the submitted contributions any hard evidence concerning relations between the socialists of diverse Ottoman communities and freemasonic organizations. He also believes that there should have been a few references to the Balkan gypsies, for immigrant gypsies from Northern Greece and Bulgaria, mainly engaged in tobacco processing industries, were prominent in the illegal activities of the Turkish Communist Party from the 1920s to the 1950s and had already experienced trade union work before coming to Turkey.

Tunçay further challenges the view that non-Turkish and non-Muslim communities enjoyed peaceful, safe and happy lives under the Ottoman rule. "Although they were not subjected to pogrom-like brutalities in the flourishing days of the empire, still they were despised and considered second-class citizens, at best tolerated" (p.158). This, says Tunçay, did not reflect magnanimity on the part of the Turks, but resulted from a symbiotic relation. The skills of various peoples of the empire were utilised in a kind of division of labor, and different religious and ethnic groups lived in separate localities and functioned in almost exclusive spheres, without intermingling with the Muslims, and in conformity with their own private community rules. Social stratification was more pronounced among these minorities - particularly the Greeks and Armenians - than it was among the Muslims, and their having co-religionists abroad made them more susceptible to Western influence.

This volume shows that the Ottoman Empire was well endowed in its late stages with intellectuals sympathetic toward socialist ideas and goals. The latter, however, faced serious obstacles in seeing their ideals turn into reality. For up to its last days,

the empire remained a predominantly agricultural society with no numerically significant or militantly conscious working class. Workers-cum-farmers, with a peasant mentality, were typical. Nor was there an established Ottoman bourgeoisie to militate against. The well-entrenched *millet* system had long encouraged nationalistic sentiments among the non-Muslim communities, who thus had no organic link with the Ottoman state and formulated their own separate, often contradictory, political agendas. The Ottoman state, doubtless, profited from the mutual opposition of Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Bulgarian and other communities, for workers of each nationality usually set up their separate unions, and there was an unconcealed rivalry between Greek and Armenian socialists. Specific nationalisms emasculated to a large extent the socialist principle, which hailed human fraternity without any discrimination of creed or race. In consequence, socialists from each nationality, too, engaged in separate activities instead of working in a single Ottoman socialist movement. Ter Minassian points out, for example, that "the examples in the Armenian press may give the impression that the first Ottoman labor movement had developed on a 'national' basis instead of an 'international' one and that it predominantly supported the workers of the non-Muslim communities (Jews, Armenians, Bulgarians and Greeks)" (p.149). Consequently, asks Feroz Ahmad rhetorically, "even though it is perfectly legitimate to talk of Ottoman socialists, how valid it is to talk about a socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire?" (p. 15)

The volume further shows that during a period when nationalism was the dominant ideology and smaller, submerged nationalities had begun to put forward their claims to nation-states of their own, socialism, which was in theory internationalist and therefore opposed to nationalism, was placed in an ambivalent position as the ally of subject peoples under autocratic rule. After the restoration of the Ottoman constitution in 1908, the socialist deputies in the Ottoman National Assembly did not play any significant part in most of the important debates of the day, like the future of the Capitulations and the language question. It was perhaps too early for them to offer a convincing socialist critique of society or socialist solutions. On the other hand, they were unable to match the nationalism of the nationalists and the anti-imperialism of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Tunçay argues, therefore, that "during the last years of the Ottoman empire, socialism and communism were used as instruments of clashing nationalisms by members of diverse groups" (p. 168).

Zürcher underlines that, during their research, the contributors discovered the extent to which the experiences of the different communities resembled each other and became aware of the fact that, though they were studying Ottoman history from a narrowly national point of view, i.e. as a phase in any one national history, these articles - if taken together - could eventually add up to a broader, multi-cultural survey. He goes on to suggest that the common Ottoman past should in the future be

studied by groups of researchers transcending the borders of the nation-states.

Desirable as this approach may be, it does not yet seem to possess many enthusiastic followers. In the meantime, however, the volume may also be helpful to those historians who still prefer to isolate the histories of the respective communities in the late Ottoman period as the 'prehistory' of the nation-states, which those communities ultimately established.

For those interested specifically in the history of the Armenians, for example, Anahide Ter Minassian's article has much to offer on its own. She argues that from 1887 to 1921 socialism was inseparable from nationalism in the movement for Armenian emancipation. Socialism - in the broad sense of the term - was introduced into the evolution of the national movement by Caucasian Armenians, who had become familiarised with this ideology through Europe and Russia. Feroz Ahmad agrees with her that socialism in the Ottoman empire in general ought to be studied in its broadest sense, for many socialist parties in the empire - not only the Armenian ones - may be seen as anarchist as much as socialist, in that they proposed opposing Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid's regime by violent and militant means. Armenian revolutionaries, writes Ter Minassian, regarded socialism as an alternative ideology that could supply the answer to the economic and social questions besetting them (like modernisation, justice, etc.) and, even more important, to the question of nationality in the Orient, where ethnic diversity and cultural chasms were the rule. Armenian revolutionaries were encouraged by the official endorsement by the Socialist International of the right of 'imprisoned' nationalities under Ottoman rule to struggle for their own self-determination and independence. Rosa Luxemburg was championing the shattering of the empire for the sake of seeing historical dialectics function. (Karl Marx, on the other hand, supported the Ottomans as a bulwark against Tsarist Russia, which he considered to be the greatest danger for Europe.) Armenian revolutionaries - Hunchakians, Dashnaks, and other social-democratic groups - hoped that socialism could help solve the Armenian Question and became involved in the developing cycle of revolutions in the East: Transcaucasia (1905), Persia (1906-12), and the Ottoman empire (1908).

Ter Minassian's overall approach is broad, covering Armenian socialism in both the Ottoman and Russian sectors of historical Armenia. She also pays due attention to Armenian freemasons; a public figure like Tigran Zaven, who was opposed to all separatism from the Ottoman empire and was a fervent defender of co-operation with the Turks; the Armenian parliamentarians in the Ottoman Chamber in 1908-15, especially Grigor Zohrap; even to the short-lived Armenian Communist Party founded by Sargis Haikuni (1918); the Armenian Specificists and Anarchists. Her contribution, however, also leads Tunçay to conclude rightly "that the Armenian Left, although it occasionally tried to overcome nationalist inclinations, could not help acting chauvinistically as representatives of an oppressed people" (p.167).

Ter Minassian's contribution is also exceptionally useful as a bibliographic guide to publications produced by Armenian socialist organizations. Concerning the Hunchakians, she notes that there does not exist a complete register - only a general list - of their numerous periodical publications; even less is there an analysis of their contents. She does not refer, however, to a recent list prepared by Artashes Ter Khachaturian, which was published in Beirut in 1992, and erroneously asserts that the periodical *Yeritassart Hayastan* disappeared in the 1970s (p.122). Ter Minassian further points out that those periodicals apart, the Hunchakians also published a large number of propaganda booklets, which have not survived and are sometimes known only by bibliographical reference. Most of the available titles, she says, are at the *Bibliothèque Nubar* in Paris and the Library of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna. As regards the Dashnaks, Ter Minassian asserts that several of their titles published from 1894 as the *Droshak* Library were soon out of print and are also no longer available, known again only by titles listed in bibliographies without, sometimes, even a date or place of publication. The lists which Ter Minassian has compiled could have been further improved if she had also consulted the late Mary Kochar's *Armyano-turetskie obshchestvenno-politicheskie otnosheniia i armyanskii vopros v kontse XIX-nachale XX vekov* [Armenian-Turkish Socio-Political Relations and the Armenian Question at the End of 19th-Early 20th Centuries] (Yerevan: University of Yerevan Press, 1988), one of the earliest and most interesting books which came out in the last years of Soviet rule in Armenia under the refreshing breeze of *glasnost*. It has two rich and interesting chapters on the propaganda activities of Armenian revolutionary parties in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, Ter Minassian's lists, even in their present form, provide us with new, interesting data on the preferences of Armenian socialists in the pre-Soviet era. The published lists indicate that Karl Kautsky was certainly the most respected foreign intellectual authority among Armenian socialists. 17 different editions of his various works were printed during the period under review by Armenians of differing political persuasions, from Dashnaks to Bolsheviks. Translations of works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Georgi Plekhanov, Edward Bernstein, Julius Martov, Jean Jaurès and Prince Pyotr Kropotkin were also available in Armenian, but the name of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin is conspicuously absent in the lists compiled.

Besides Ter Minassian's contribution, the other articles on other non-Turkish communities in the Ottoman empire may also be of interest to Armenian historians studying this period and help them put the history of Armenian revolutionary parties in broader perspective. On the relations of non-Turkish socialist parties with Muslim leftists, for example, Fikret Adanir points out that non-Muslim socialists, in Bulgaria and Macedonia in particular, while opposing chauvinism generally and paying lip service to internationalism in their programmatic documents, tried in fact to enlarge

their social basis by agreement with nationalists and opened up their programmes to non-socialists of their own ethnic community. However, Muslim Turks wishing to join their ranks were absolutely required to be socialists. Secondly, it becomes clear that the strategy and tactics of the Armenian organizations - geared towards effecting Great Power intervention in the Ottoman empire - were paralleled by other revolutionary groups, like the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO). The activists of the latter also "assumed that Europe would not tolerate the bloody suppression of a Christian popular revolt in Macedonia and that a European intervention on behalf of the Christians would pave the way, if not for Macedonian statehood, then at least for the union of the country with Bulgaria. The IMRO's task now was to prepare the population politically and militarily for a general uprising" (p.36). In early 1903, Macedonian anarchists, too, hoped to induce the European Powers by terrorism against a French passenger liner and the *Banque Ottomane Impériale* to intervene directly in Macedonia. Thirdly, scattered, incoherent, yet very useful, information is provided on the relationship between the CUP and different socialist groups in the empire. The question whether the CUP sincerely tried to reach a *modus vivendi* on a federative basis with non-Turkish revolutionary organisations is raised more than once, but is never answered adequately. Fourthly, we discover that some minority representatives in the Ottoman National Assembly were against abolishing the Capitulations. What about the Armenian deputies? Fifthly, it becomes clear that the Dashnaksutiun was accepted into the Socialist International in 1907 only as the 'subsection of Turkish Armenia'. Later, the mainly Jewish Workers Federation of Thessaloniki was also admitted, but only as the 'subsection of workers of Salonica'. The International Socialist Bureau (ISB) would not agree to affiliate an 'Ottoman section' until it comprised all the nationalities living in the empire. Sixthly, we are told that the French socialist newspaper, *L'Humanité*, was indebted for a large part of its data on events in the Ottoman Empire to Armenian socialist militants. And last, but not least, it becomes evident that Armenian researchers have so far neglected, during their research, the archives and the periodical publications of the ISB, which may yet turn out to be very useful for studying the history of Ottoman Armenians in general, and that of the Dashnaksutiun in particular.

In a nutshell, *Nationalism and Socialism* is an interesting and innovative contribution to our knowledge of the Ottoman past, a volume which sets a new agenda and hints at new paths for further research. Reading it will be a 'must' for the foreseeable future for all professionals interested in its broad topic. One may only regret, then, the numerous spelling and typing errors, which litter its pages and wish that its editors had been more careful in this regard.

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