

Ibrahim Kaypakkaya on the Kurdish National Question (1972)

[This document originally appeared in the RIM magazine, *A World to Win*, #5, in 1986. — BannedThought.net Ed.]

The following text is excerpted from a lengthy polemic by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya entitled *The National Question in Turkey*. This work was originally completed in December 1971, before Ibrahim Kaypakkaya led the genuine Marxist-Leninists in splitting with the Shafak revisionists, who were also billing themselves then as the Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Party of Turkey (TIKP), and founded the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML) in April 1972. *The National Question in Turkey* was re-edited by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya in June 1972, soon after the organisational split with the TIKP revisionists.

The excerpts printed here are translated from a collection entitled *Selected Writings, Ibrahim Kaypakkaya*, which was published by Ocak Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1979. —AWTW

2. Who is subjected to national oppression?

According to the Shafak revisionists, it is the *Kurdish people* who are being subjected to national oppression. This fails to grasp what national oppression means. National oppression is the oppression to which the ruling classes of the dominant nation subject the oppressed, dependent and minority nations. In Turkey, national oppression is the oppression by the ruling classes of the dominant Turkish nation not just of the Kurdish people but of the entire *Kurdish nation*, and not even of the Kurdish nation alone, but of all minority nationalities.

“People” and “nation” are not the same thing. The concept of people today generally includes the working class, poor and middle peasants, semi-proletarians and the urban petit bourgeoisie. In backward countries, the revolutionary wing of the national bourgeoisie, which forms part of the ranks of the people’s democratic revolution against imperialism, feudalism and comprador capitalism, is also included among the classes of people. However, the concept of “nation” comprises all of the classes and strata, including the ruling classes. . . .

People, in every historical period, refer to those classes and strata, which benefit from revolution and form the revolutionary ranks. People are not a social grouping that appears in a specific historical period only to disappear later on; it exists in every historical period. However, nations have appeared together with capitalism and “in the epoch of rising capitalism” and will disappear in an advanced stage of socialism.

The concept of people, in every stage of the revolution, changes. However, nation does not depend on the stage of the revolution.

Today, Kurdish workers, Kurdish poor and middle peasants, semi-proletarians and the urban petit-bourgeoisie and the revolutionary wing of the Kurdish bourgeoisie, which is to join the ranks of people’s democratic revolution, are included in the concept of *Kurdish people*. Whereas,

other than these classes and strata, all other sections of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and the Kurdish landlords are also included in the concept of Kurdish nation. Certain overly knowledgeable wiseacres claim that landlords are not considered part of a nation. What's more, these gentlemen even hatched the marvel that the Kurds do not yet constitute a nation due to the existence of landlords in the Kurdish region. This is a frightfully demagogic statement and a sophistry. Do the landlords not speak the same language? Do they not reside on the same land? Are they not part of the unified economic existence and spiritual formation? And besides, nations emerge not with capitalist development reaching its final limit but at *the dawn of capitalism*. With capitalism penetrating into a country and unifying the markets in that region to a certain degree, the communities already meeting all the other conditions are considered a nation. If it were not so, all stable communities in the backward countries and regions where capitalist development is limited could not be considered nations. In China up until the 1940's there was a rather strong state of feudal fragmentation, and according to this logic, one would have to deny the existence of nations in China previously. Until the 1917 revolution, feudalism had a strong presence in the broad countryside of Russia; this understanding would lead to rejecting the existence of nations in Russia. In Turkey, for instance, during the years of the Liberation War [this refers to the war waged under the leadership of the Turkish comprador bourgeoisie and landlords against imperialist occupation forces after the First World War —AWTW], feudalism was much stronger than it is today; according to this understanding, one would have to conclude that during those years in Turkey there were no nations. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, feudalism exists in varying degrees; with this understanding, it would be necessary to reject the existence of nations. Obviously, the thesis claiming that the Kurds do not constitute a nation is patently absurd from beginning to end, contrary to facts and also harmful in practice. Harmful, because such a thesis only serves the ruling classes of the dominant, exploiting and oppressing nations. Hence, they would have found a justification to vindicate all the privileges and inequalities in their favour and to legitimise the national oppression and suffering to which they subject the oppressed, dependent and minority nationalities. Thus, the struggle the proletariat must wage for the equality of nations and for doing away with all national oppression, privileges, etc., would be cast overboard. The right of nations to self-determination would be abandoned. The imperialists—colonisation of backward nations, intervention in their internal affairs and perfidious violation of the right of nations to self-determination would all be legitimised by the notion that “they do not constitute a nation”. Similarly, in the multi-national states, the dominant nation's every form of oppression and bullying of the minority nationalities would be legitimised away. Those who claim that there would be no nation to speak of if landlords existed are sounding a trumpet for the dominant nations. Those who claim that the Kurds do not constitute a nation are blowing the horn of the Turkish ruling classes. As is known, the Turkish ruling classes maintain that the Kurds are not a nation. By defending the privileges of the Turkish ruling classes, these gentlemen treacherously sabotage the mutual confidence, solidarity and unity amongst the masses of working people of various nationalities...

Not just the *Kurdish people* but the whole Kurdish nation is being subjugated to national oppression, with the exception of a handful of big landlords and a few big bourgeois. The Kurdish workers, peasants, urban petit-bourgeoisie as well as small landlords all suffer national oppression.

In fact the target, in essence, of national oppression is the bourgeoisie of the subjugated and dependent nation, because the capitalists and landlords of the ruling nations want to possess the entire wealth and market of the country unchallenged. They want to keep the privilege of establishing a state right in their own hands. By banning other languages, they want to bring about a “unity of language”, which is crucial for the market. The bourgeoisie and landlords of the oppressed nationality stand as an important obstacle to this, because they too would like to be the master of their own market and to control it and to exploit the material wealth and people’s labour themselves.

These are the powerful economic factors that pit the bourgeoisie and the landlords of two nations against each other; hence the unceasing attempts of the bourgeoisie and landlords of the ruling nation to perpetrate national oppression; from this stems the fact that national oppression is directed against the bourgeoisie and landlords of the oppressed nation.

Today, fascist martial law has filled Diyarbakir Prison with democratic Kurdish intellectuals and youth representing the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords. Today, small landlords and some of the Kurdish religious figures are also in jail, or are being hunted down for imprisonment.

As for the handful of big landlords, their cohorts and a few big bourgeois, they have long since established an alliance with the Turkish ruling classes. All the privileges are just as accessible to them as they are to the Turkish ruling classes. The army, the gendarmerie, the police are also at their service & A very large section of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords is subject to national oppression by the Turkish ruling classes. They face oppression even by the big Kurdish feudal beys [governor of a district or province]. A handful of big landlords are taking large sums of extortion money from the small landlords through pressure and force. The fact that the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords are enraged by the big feudal beys and their cohorts are based on these two factors....

By maintaining that national oppression is being administered to *the Kurdish people*, the Shafak revisionists fall into one of two errors: either the concept of *Kurdish people* is being used correctly and therefore not all of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords are included within it; in that case, the national oppression perpetrated against the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords is being overlooked and therefore indirectly being given approval, thus they descend to the line of Turkish nationalism. Or, the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords are being incorrectly included within the concept of the Kurdish people as a whole; in this case, the heavy oppression of the Kurdish people, who suffer class oppression in addition to national oppression, is being concealed; the national movement and class movement are being portrayed as one and the same thing, and thus they descend to the line of Kurdish nationalism.

Besides, other than the Kurdish nation, there are minority nationalities, which do not constitute a nation; and in the form of banning their language, etc., national oppression is perpetrated against them. The Shafak revisionists leave this point aside completely.

3. What is the purpose of national oppression?

According to the Shafak revisionists, the purpose of national oppression is “to daunt the Kurdish people.” “The pro-American governments have carried out vicious oppression and torture in order to *daunt the Kurdish people.*” (My emphasis—I.K.) Certainly, one of the purposes of the pro-American governments is to daunt the Kurdish people. In fact the purpose of their oppression over even the Turkish people and generally over the whole people of Turkey, including Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Arabs, Vazs, etc., is to daunt them. But is this the purpose of national oppression? If that were true, how could the oppression perpetrated against the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords be explained? What would be the meaning of banning the Kurdish language? If that were true, what difference would there be between the oppression inflicted by the pro-American governments against the Turkish people and that against the Kurdish people? The pro-American governments want to intimidate and cow the Turkish people as well, and they carry out the most vicious oppression and torture to this end. The martial law courts are crammed with hundreds of Turkish workers, peasants and intellectuals. After the events of 15-16 June (1970), hundreds of Turkish workers were barbarically tortured by the police. The peasants involved in land occupation were mercilessly beaten in police stations. Leaders were thrown in dungeons. Therefore, the purpose of the pro-American governments does not solely consist of daunting the “KURDISH PEOPLE”. That is the policy implemented by all reactionary governments against the whole working people regardless of their nationality. Beyond that, not just the Kurdish people, but also the whole Kurdish nation (excluding a handful of the big feudal beys) is subject to oppression and torture in order to achieve not just “daunting” but a more basic purpose. What is that purpose? In its most general expression, that purpose is to own the entire market and material wealth of the country unchallenged. It is to obtain new privileges, to expand and use the old ones to the utmost. To this end, the bourgeoisie and landlords of the ruling nation spend great effort to maintain the political borders of the country in order to prevent at all cost the separation of the regions, where the various nationalities live, from the country. One of the conditions for the development of commerce to the fullest is a unified language. For this purpose, the bourgeoisie and landlords of the ruling nation would like to have their language spoken throughout the whole country and even try to make this accepted through force. In Comrade Stalin’s words, “who will control the market”, that is the essence of the question. The slogans “national unity” and “indivisible unity and integrity of the state together with its country and nation”, are the expression of the selfish interests of the bourgeoisie and landlords and their desire to unconditionally control “the market”. National oppression that is carried out for controlling the market by the bourgeoisie and landlords and national oppression carried out by the ruling bureaucracy for “caste purposes” extends to the appropriation of democratic rights, including mass murder (that is, genocide). In Turkey, there have been many examples of genocide.

Thus, the oppression against the labourers of the oppressed nationality assumes a compound character. First, the class oppression perpetrated against the working people to exploit them more and to suppress class struggle; second, the national oppression perpetrated against almost all of the classes of the minority nations and nationalities for the purposes mentioned above, namely national purposes. Communists must distinguish between these two forms of oppression. Because the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords, for instance, are in favour of the first type of oppression, while opposing the second type. We however are against both forms of

oppression. We support the struggle of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords to eliminate national oppression; but on the other hand we have to struggle against them also in order to eliminate class oppression. The Shafak revisionists depict national and class oppression as though they were one and the same thing....

5. Those Who Champion National Oppression in Turkey and Their Accomplices

In our country, the real champions of national oppression are the big Turkish bourgeoisie, that is, of comprador nature, and the landlords. The US imperialists support and instigate their policy of national oppression and racism. But the Turkish middle bourgeoisie, which has a national character, participates with more refined and stealthy methods in the same crime. As Comrade Lenin expressed it, they:

“...approach the language question in the same way as they approach all political questions—like hypocritical hucksters, holding out one hand (openly) to democracy and the other (behind their back) to the feudalists and police.”

While on the one hand opposing the feudal stick in the hands of the state by putting forward that it will be of no use, they cannot refrain from proposing more refined and polite methods of national oppression... *“The wrecking of the brotherhood between the Turks and the Kurds, based on historical roots, of the national unity in Turkey and the territorial integrity of Turkey, in whatever form, would lead to consequences contrary to the real interests of both the Turks and the Kurds and strengthen the position of imperialism in this part of the world.”* (My emphasis.)

Is this not exactly ruling nation chauvinism itself? Posturing in favour of the equality among nations in words, but in reality extending the recognition of the privilege of forming a state only to the Turks and liquidating the *right* of the Kurds to form a state with demagogic bourgeois slogans, such as “national unity” and “territorial integrity”, is this not to defend inequality among nations and the privileges of the Turkish bourgeoisie? Socialists [revolutionary communists—AWTW] oppose even the smallest privilege favouring a nation and inequality. Whereas in Turkey, to form a national state has always been a privilege of the Turkish nation and still continues to be so. We the communists do not defend this privilege either, just as we do not defend any other privileges. We defend and continue to defend the right of the Kurdish nation to form a state with all our might. We will respect this right to the end; we do not support the privileged position of Turks over the Kurds (and over other nationalities); we educate the masses to recognise this right without hesitation and to reject the right to form a state as a privilege in the monopoly of any single nation. Comrade Lenin points out that:

“If in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the oppressor nation.”

While on the one hand posturing as opponents of privileges, our middle bourgeois of national character and our social-opportunists stealthily and jealously embrace with two hands the privileges favouring the Turkish bourgeoisie. These hypocritical shopkeepers hold out one hand

(openly) to democracy and the other (behind their backs) to the reactionaries and police agents, to unbridled and fanatic Turkish nationalism, feudal racism, and become their accomplices.

8. The Kurdish National Movement

The national movements in Turkey are neither new nor solely composed of the Kurdish movement. They began even before the collapse of Ottoman society and have continued to the present. Bulgarians, Greeks, Hungarians, Albanians, Kurds, Armenians, Arabs, Yugoslavs, Romanians... have all repeatedly risen up against the dominant Turkish nation within the Ottoman state; history has brought all, except the Kurdish movement, to a certain resolution. Today, within the borders of Turkey, the national movement that has not been resolved yet is the Kurdish movement. The natural tendency of the national movement in Turkey also has been the formation of states with national unity. Capitalism, which quietly entered the life of East Europe and Asia at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, has aroused the national movements in these regions. To the extent that capitalism and commodity production developed, the other nations within the borders of Turkey have separated themselves from Turkey and become organised in separate national (or multi-national) states, with the exception of the Armenians, who were massacred and driven from their lands *en masse* in 1915 and 1919-20.

The Lausanne Treaty divided the Kurds among various states. Trampling upon the right of the Kurdish nation to self-determination and defying the Kurdish nations own desires and inclinations, the imperialists and the new Turkish government defined the borders by bargaining.

Thus, the Kurdish region was divided up among Iran, Iraq and Turkey.

Here another point deserves attention: The partitioning of Kurdistan *in violation of its right to self-determination* is certainly a historical injustice. And, as Comrade Lenin stated on a different occasion, the task of the communist parties in such a case is to unceasingly protest this injustice and to condemn the entire ruling class. But it would be mindless to put the rectification of *such* an injustice in the programme. This is because there exists a whole number of examples of historical injustices that have long since lost their character as a contemporary issue. “So long as these are not historical injustices that continue *to hinder* social development and class struggle *directly*”, the communist parties should not adopt a stand for their redress, which would divert the attention of the working class from fundamental questions. The historical injustice, which we mentioned above, has already lost the character of being an issue of the day. Therefore, communists should not display stupidity and lack of circumspection by demanding its rectification...

Within the borders of Turkey, as determined by the Lausanne Treaty, the Kurdish national movement has continued. From time to time uprisings occurred. The most important of these have been the 1925 Sheik Said Rebellion, the 1928 Agri Rebellion, the 1930 Zilan Rebellion and the 1938 Dersim Rebellion. These movements, along with a “national” character, had a feudal character as well: the feudal beys, who had been sovereign up until that point, clashed with the central authority, which had begun to undermine their sovereignty. This was the essential factor driving the feudal beys to rebel against the central authority. In the face of the central authority

held by the Turkish ruling classes, the desire of the Kurdish bourgeoisie to control “its own” internal market merged with the desire of the feudal beys for sovereignty. As for why the peasant masses participated in these movements on a wide scale, this was because of national oppression. As Comrade Stalin pointed out, the policy of national oppression “*diverts the attention of the broad masses of people away from the social problem towards the ‘common’ problems of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This in turn creates an atmosphere suitable for spreading the lie of the ‘harmony of interests,’ for covering up the class interests of the proletariat (and the peasants) and for spiritually enslaving the proletariat (and the peasants).*”

All these reasons united the feudal Kurdish beys, the rising Kurdish bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, and the Kurdish peasants against the Turkish bourgeoisie and landlords, who controlled the new state, and against the ruling bureaucracy, which acted in conjunction with them. The Turkish bourgeoisie and landlords, masters of the new state, proceeded to resurrect racism and spread it in every sphere. They re-wrote history from the very beginning, inventing a racist and absurd theory about the origin of all nations from the Turks. The origin of all languages was also Turkish (!). The theory of the “Sun Language” was concocted in order to prove this. The Turks were the master nation (really, those who were masters were the Turkish ruling classes): the minorities were obliged to obey them. Speaking any language other than Turkish was forbidden. All the democratic rights of the national minorities were suspended, and every form of humiliation or immiseration of these peoples was legitimate. Those who were Kurdish were given degrading names. Efforts were made to disseminate Turkish chauvinism among the Turkish workers and peasants, and this was more or less successful. Martial law, implemented throughout the country, assumed especially intense forms in the East. The Kurdish region was frequently declared a “prohibited military zone,” etc. As a reaction to this dominant nation chauvinism, the nationalism of the oppressed nation was inevitably strengthened. It was unavoidable that this drove the Kurdish peasants into the ranks of the bourgeoisie and the feudal beys of their own nation. The Kurdish people, the vast majority of whom didn’t even speak Turkish, and especially the Kurdish peasants naturally reacted violently to the officials of this new regime who oppressed, degraded and tyrannized them just like a colonial governor. By necessity this righteous reaction of the peasants wound up uniting with the reaction of the feudal Kurdish beys and the Kurdish bourgeoisie. And thus were born the Kurdish rebellions.

The communists support the progressive and democratic elements of these rebellions—those which are directed against oppression and the policy of the oppressor nation, against inequality and privilege. But they oppose the desire of the feudal beys to secure sovereignty for themselves as well as the bourgeoisie’s struggle for its own superiority; and they do not defend the privileges and supremacy of the bourgeoisie and the landlords of any one nation. At that time, the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) thoroughly supported the policy of national oppression adopted by the Turkish ruling classes because it followed an incorrect policy. Instead of uniting the powerful and righteous reaction of the Kurdish peasants against national oppression with the leadership of the proletariat, it tailed after the Turkish bourgeoisie and landlords, and thus did great damage to the unity of the working people of the two nationalities; and among the Kurdish labouring people it sowed seeds of distrust of the Turkish workers and peasants.

Those who applaud the barbarous suppression of the Kurdish rebellions by the Turkish state and the subsequent mass-scale massacres as a “progressive,” “revolutionary” movement directed

against feudalism are incorrigible nationalists on behalf of the oppressor nation. Such people choose to overlook the fact that the new Turkish state not only attacked the feudal Kurdish beys but also savagely attacked all the Kurdish people, including women and children. Such people forget that, while carrying out these massacres, the new Turkish state was actually quite friendly with the feudal beys, who did not oppose it, and it implemented a policy of strengthening and supporting them. Such people choose to overlook the extremely important difference between the factors compelling the Kurdish peasants to rebel and those compelling the Kurdish feudal beys to rebel.

There are also so-called communists who attempt to defend the national oppression policy of the Turkish ruling classes, claiming that British imperialism was behind the Sheik Said rebellion. Here we shall not discuss whether British imperialism was behind it or not. We shall discuss whether the policy of national oppression could be supported on the basis of such a claim. Let us assume that British imperialism had a hand in the Sheik Said rebellion. Under such circumstances, what should have been the stand of the communist movement? First, it should have been to oppose the Turkish ruling classes' suppression of the Kurdish national movement by force, to wage an active struggle against this, and to demand that the Kurdish nation itself decide whether to form its own state. In practice this would have meant that there should have been a general plebiscite in the Kurdish region, without interference from outside, and that in this or some similar fashion the Kurdish nation itself should have determined whether to secede. The communist movement would have struggled first for the withdrawal of all military units that were sent to suppress the Kurdish movement, for preventing any interference whatsoever, for the self-determination of the Kurdish nation; and it would have vigorously fought against the Turkish ruling class, going among the masses to expose its policy of suppression, oppression and intervention. Secondly, it would have also exposed to the masses the British imperialists' policy of pitting nationalities against one another and the damage this inflicts on the labouring people of all nationalities and on their unity, and it would have vigorously fought against British imperialism's policy of interference in internal affairs. Thirdly, it would have evaluated the secession of the Kurdish nation "on the basis of the interests of the proletariat's class struggle for social development and for socialism as a whole," and reached a conclusion on whether to actually support secession. Had it considered secession beneficial to the interests of the proletariat, it would have conducted propaganda for this end among the Kurdish workers and peasants; and the Kurdish communists especially would have carried out propaganda among their own people for unity, struggling against the attempts to subordinate the fight against national oppression to the strengthening of the mullahs, the beys, etc....

The national oppression perpetrated by the Turkish ruling classes has continued until this day. And it still continues. Parallel to this, the Kurdish national movement has continued as well, with the difference that a section of the Kurdish feudal beys have defected to the ranks of the Turkish ruling classes. Also, certain big Kurdish bourgeois, whose number is extremely limited, have joined the ranks of the Turkish ruling classes. The Kurdish bourgeoisie has developed quite a bit of strength, while feudal influence over the Kurdish national movement has weakened. Today the Kurdish intellectuals and small landlords who have adopted their ideology are leading by the strengthened Kurdish bourgeoisie, and the Kurdish national movement. As for the Kurdish workers and peasants, compared to the past they stand relatively more free of the influence of the

Kurdish bourgeoisie and landlords. Marxist-Leninist ideas have begun to develop roots among the Kurdish workers, poor peasants and intellectuals, and are spreading rapidly.

Under these conditions, what should be the attitude of the communist movement in Turkey toward the Kurdish national movement? We pass on to this point now and shall examine the line of the Shafak revisionists, which is erroneous and harmful to the unity of the peoples....

10. Within the Kurdish National Movement, the “Positive” Action of the Bourgeoisie and Small Landlords Strives to Fortify Nationalism

Generally in every national movement and specifically in the Kurdish national movement, the real aim of the bourgeoisie is to obtain its own supremacy. Its real aim is to control the market, and to monopolize the material wealth, etc., in its region. It is to attain inequality and privileges in its own favour and to ensure its own national development. The bourgeoisie and, to the extent that they participate in the national movement, the landlords, thus demand inequality and privileges in their own favour. They want to appropriate the democratic rights of other nations. They want to inflict national oppression on those who are weaker and less powerful than themselves. They seek to segregate the proletarians with national barriers and to have the proletariat and other labourers of their own nation support their nationalist aspirations unconditionally. They want to substitute their own national culture for the international culture of the proletariat and democracy; they want to develop the national culture (that is, the culture of that bourgeoisie in power), to feed the proletariat and labourers with national culture and to make them unconditional supporters of its own class aspirations.

The bourgeoisie and landlords resist the historical tendency towards the assimilation of nations, leaving aside the question of forced assimilation; that is, they resist spontaneous assimilation, they resist the spontaneous obliteration of national distinctions, they resist the unity and amalgamation of the workers of all nationalities in a given country into united workers' organisations, and instead want to divide the proletarians according to nationality and to unite the proletarians of their own nation not into class organisations but into “national organizations” and for their own class aims.

Within the Kurdish national movement today, it is impossible not to see, along with the general democratic content, the reactionary aspirations, similar to those above, that strive to fortify nationalism. These are the aspirations of the bourgeoisie and landlords, which lead the Kurdish national movement.

The Shafak revisionists have completely ignored the “positive” action of the bourgeoisie and the landlords that strives to fortify nationalism within the Kurdish national movement. According to the Shafak revisionists, the movement that is developing in the Kurdish region of Turkey is not a national movement, with its progressive and reactionary aspects, but a completely progressive *people's movement* waged against “*national oppression and assimilation*” and for “*democratic rights, equality of nations and self-determination.*” Thus, the Shafak revisionists provide support for the nationalist and anti-proletarian aspirations of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords and, by tailing them, hamper the solidarity of the two peoples. The Turkish-chauvinist line of the Shafak revisionists has been reconciled with Kurdish nationalism....

11. What Should be the Stand of the Class-conscious Proletariat in Turkey on the Kurdish National Movement?

First of all, it should be pointed out that, regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey shall not take up a position under the banner of bourgeois nationalism. In Comrade Stalin's words: "*The conscious proletariat has its own tested banner and there can be no need for it to hold rank under the banner of the bourgeoisie.*"

Second, regardless of its nationality, the conscious proletariat in Turkey shall endeavour to gather the masses of workers and peasants around its own banner and lead the class struggle of all labouring classes. On the ground of the state of Turkey, it shall unite the workers and labourers from all nations in Turkey within common class organizations.

Third, regardless of its nationality, the conscious proletariat in Turkey shall unconditionally support the general democratic content of the Kurdish national movement that is directed against the oppression, tyranny and privileges of the Turkish ruling classes as well as the removal of all forms of national oppression and the equality of nations. It shall resolutely and unconditionally support the movements of the other oppressed nationalities that strive in the same direction.

Fourth, whatever the nationality, the conscious proletariat in Turkey shall remain totally neutral to the struggle waged by the bourgeoisie and landlords of various nationalities to secure their own supremacy and privileges. The conscious proletariat in Turkey shall never support the tendency within the Kurdish national movement that strives to strengthen Kurdish nationalism; it shall never aid bourgeois nationalism; it shall in no way support the struggle undertaken by the Kurdish bourgeoisie and landlords for their own supremacy and privileges; namely, it shall be content to support the general democratic content of the Kurdish national movement and shall not go beyond that...

The Shafak revisionists present the Kurdish national movement, within which there are different elements, as a homogeneous "Kurdish people's" movement and depict it as a movement that is completely and utterly progressive; by not specifying which points are progressive and which are reactionary, or the point beyond which the reactionary aspirations of the bourgeoisie and landlords take over, they reach exactly those conclusions that benefit the bourgeoisie and landlords. Thus, in relation to the Turkish proletariat generally, and the Kurdish proletariat specifically, the Shafak revisionists make concessions to the Kurdish bourgeoisie and landlords! Tomorrow, when the "positive action" of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and landlords makes itself more strongly felt, we are curious what the Shafak revisionists would do. But really what they will do is already evident! They will unconditionally join ranks with the Turkish nationalists.

Let us state this point as well: communists always and absolutely distinguish between the nationalism of an oppressed nation and that of an oppressor nation and between the nationalism of a small nation and that of a big nation.

Comrade Lenin has the following to say on the subject:

“In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it....

“That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or ‘great’ nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petit bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view.”

Comrade Lenin continues with the following:

“...Nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; ‘offended’ nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality, if only through negligence or jest—to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades. That is why in this case it is better to overdo rather than under do the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities.” (“The Question of Nationalities or ‘Autonomisation’ [Continued]”, *Selected Works*, Volume 3, p. 690.)

Is what the Shafak revisionists do anything like what Comrade Lenin proposes? No, not at all! The Shafak revisionists today follow a line that is in essence Turkish nationalism; with a heap of demagogy, they wantonly trample on the Kurdish nation’s right to self-determination; and they take the representatives of Turkish chauvinism as their flag-bearer. What they do is completely at variance with what Comrade Lenin upholds....

Previously we have mentioned that the general tendency of every national movement is to form an independent national state, that the requirements of capitalism and commodity production are best satisfied in this manner and that the most profound economic factors operate in this direction. Certainly the general tendency of the Kurdish national movement as well is in the direction of forming an independent national state. However, the general tendency is one thing and the concrete demands formulated by a national movement are another. The concrete demands do not contradict this general tendency. But not every national movement may choose this general tendency—namely, to form a separate state—as its concrete aim. There are innumerable factors that determine whether this happens. The relation of forces in the country and on a world scale, the considerations of the bourgeoisie and the landlords of various nationalities within the country concerning their own interests, the character of the national oppression, tactical concerns, etc.—all such factors determine the concrete aims formulated by a national movement....

In Turkey, the Kurdish national movement has not yet openly formulated the demand for *secession*. Currently the demands openly formulated by the Kurdish national movement are the recognition of the Kurdish language (in reading, writing and speech), radio broadcasts in Kurdish, the removal of obstacles hindering the free dissemination of the “national culture” (in

reality, the culture of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and landlords), the ending of the policy of assimilation, the availability of schools providing education in Kurdish, the recognition of the right to self-determination, etc. The various reasons that we have gone into above prevent the Kurdish national movement from openly formulating the demand for *secession*; therefore, at least today, it is not correct to say that, not the Kurdish people but the Kurdish nation is struggling for self-determination.

In maintaining this we do not at all overlook the powerful desire among the Kurdish bourgeoisie and small landlords to secede. But we hold that this desire has not become the open demand of the national movement. For instance, today the national movement in Northern Ireland has actually openly formulated the demand for secession. The Kurdish national movement in Turkey had also, in the past, openly come out with the demand for secession, etc. The fact that the Kurdish national movement today has not openly formulated the demand for secession does not mean that it will not do so at a later date either.

Furthermore, various compromises are possible between the bourgeois and landlord classes of the two nations as well; let us not overlook this either. Indeed, the Barzani movement in Iraq has rested content with partial autonomy. Besides, while a section of the Kurdish national movement might demand secession, another section might not do so. Consequently, let us not roll up our trousers before the river is in sight.

12. Let Us Not Deny the Influence of the Nationalism of the Dominant Nation Over the Turkish Workers and Peasants

The Shafak revisionists hold that “*all of the workers and peasants of Turkey*” are supporting the struggle of the Kurdish people (!) struggle “against the policy of national oppression and assimilation,” and the “struggle for democratic rights, equality of nationalities and for self-determination” (my emphasis—I.K.).

Here concrete reality has been betrayed for the sake of embellished sentences. First of all, let us correct the error that, leaving aside “all of the workers and peasants of Turkey,” *not even the class conscious proletariat* should, under all circumstances, support the struggle “for self-determination” (not the right of self-determination). It should support secession if, in the concrete situation, it happens to be in conformity with the struggle waged by the proletariat for the goal of socialism; if not, it should respect the demand of the Kurdish nation for secession and accept secession without supporting it actively. We shall return to this point later on.

Besides, we cannot claim that “all the workers and peasants of Turkey” *today* support even the most righteous and progressive demands of the Kurdish nation. That is only something that is desirable and not, unfortunately, something that actually exists. The consciousness of the Turkish workers and peasants has been blinded greatly by the Turkish ruling classes with the demagogy of nationalism. Leaving aside the peasants, even the sights of the most advanced elements of the proletariat have been more or less benighted by the nationalism of the dominant nation. That is, there stands before the communists in Turkey the task of destroying Turkish nationalism and ridding the workers and peasants of the remnants of all forms of bourgeois nationalism. Any

evaluation that leads to neglecting or belittling this task is only harmful with respect to the class struggle....

15. “Self-determination,” the Right to Self-determination

“Self-determination” and “the right to self-determination” are different things. “Self-determination” means to secede, to form an independent state. However, “the right to self-determination” means, as we pointed out above, “*the right to form an independent state.*” What the communists unconditionally uphold under all circumstances is “*the right to self-determination,*” that is, *the right to form an independent state.* “The right to self-determination” and “self-determination,” or, phrasing it differently, “the right to form a separate state” and “forming a separate state” must never be confounded. Although the communists uphold the first under all circumstances, the communist movement, in Comrade Lenin’s words, “*must decide the latter question exclusively on its merits in each particular case in conformity with the interests of social development as a whole and with the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism.*” ...

What is the stand of the Shafak revisionists? To uphold the people’s right to make revolution (!), to trample on the right of nations to self-determination. Moreover, by saying that “the right of the Kurdish nation to self-determination cannot be separated from the struggle against imperialism and from the struggle for agrarian revolution, which rests on the poor peasants,” they make even *the right* of self-determination dependent on conditions. Don’t forget, this is the solution (!) that the Shafak revisionists propose for the national question...

16. When Does the Class-conscious Proletariat in Turkey Support the Secession of the Kurdish Nation? When Does It Not?

Regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey views the question of the Kurdish nation’s forming of a separate state from the standpoint of the development and the strengthening of revolution. If the forming of a separate state by the Kurdish nation will increase the prospects for the development and success of the people’s democratic revolution under the leadership of the proletariat in the Kurdistan of Turkey, then regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey shall support the secession. If the secession will delay and encumber the development and success of the people’s democratic revolution under the leadership of the proletariat, then regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat shall not support the secession. Let’s assume that the communist movement developing in our country were rapidly to grow roots among the peasants in Kurdistan, that the land revolution were developing swiftly and spreading, and that the revolutionary movement were developing more rapidly in the Kurdish region than in the western region; under these circumstances the retention of the Kurdish region within the borders of Turkey would have only hindered revolution in this region through the obstacles caused by the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie and landlords of the Turkish nation. Or, let us consider that in various areas in Kurdistan, red political power emerged while revolution was developing in the West at a much slower pace. Again under these conditions, the repression by the Turkish ruling classes and their state would have delayed and obstructed the revolution developing in the East. In that case, the secession of the East would accelerate and strengthen the development of revolution. Such a situation, by

accelerating the development of revolution in the West and the East, would certainly affect and accelerate the development of revolution in other countries of the Middle East as well. In such a situation, regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey would desire and defend the secession of the Kurdish nation and the securing of conditions for even faster development of the revolution that were unfolding rapidly in Kurdistan

On the other hand, if in the other regions the revolution were developing more quickly, and its development were slower in the Kurdish region; if the secession of Kurdistan were to slow down the development of revolution still more and strengthen the domination of the feudal sheys, beys, mullahs, etc. in this region; and if the revolutionary struggle in the East were to be weakened, being deprived of the support from the West, then in that case, regardless of its nationality, the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey would not support the secession. If, after the victory of revolution in Turkey, a secessionist movement under the leadership of the Kurdish bourgeoisie were to develop, then regardless of its nationality the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey would not support the secession, etc.

What we have said is certainly based on assumptions. But in terms of grasping under what conditions the communist movement shall take a position in favour of or against secession, it is useful to consider these hypothetical cases. Besides, they are not cases contrary to reality, nor things that cannot possibly emerge; they are in conformity with reality and things that can quite possibly occur.

17. If the Kurdish Nation Decides to Secede, What Shall Be the Attitude of the Class-conscious Proletariat in Turkey?

In case of secession, two problems would present themselves:

The first is the situation, as we mentioned above, where secession positively affects the development of revolution, in which case the question is straightforward: the class conscious proletariat of every nationality resolutely supports and defends secession.

The second is the situation where secession negatively affects the development of revolution. If that were the case and, despite this, the Kurdish nation wanted to secede, then what would be the stand of the class-conscious proletariat in Turkey? In their discussion of this question, the Shafak revisionists responded: prevent secession by resorting to every method, including the use of force. The response of our movement to the same question is that in such a situation communists would categorically reject the use of force. Although carrying out propaganda in favour of “uniting” with the Kurdish workers and peasants, they would never confront the demand for secession with force. Recognising “the right to self-determination” means never to prevent secession nor to cause hardship when a nation wants to exercise this right, that is, to secede. Communists leave it completely and strictly to the Kurdish nation to decide whether the Kurdish nation will form a separate state or not. If the Kurdish nation wants to, it forms a separate state; if not, it does not. Those who will determine this are not others, but the Kurdish nation. In addition to not placing obstacles in the way of a nation’s demand to secede, the communists would themselves also wage an active struggle against the attempts of the government of the bourgeoisie and landlords to prevent secession and the use of force. The communists would

struggle against every form of interference from outside. If the Kurdish workers and labourers were conscious of the fact that secession weakens the revolution, then they would in any event do everything in their power to unite. If they are not conscious of it, no one would have the right to interfere from outside on their behalf....

19. The Shafak Revisionists Buttress Themselves Up with The Ruling-nation Nationalism of M. Kemal and I. Inonu

The Shafak revisionists approve of the national oppression brought against the Kurdish nations and other minority nationalities in the past. They applaud the fact that in the Sivas Congress [September 1919—AWTW] Mustapha Kemal [Ataturk, the first head of the new state] said, “in Turkey, Kurds and Turks live.” They warmly embrace the fact that in Lausanne [referring to the 1923 Lausanne Treaty] Ismet Inonu [the foreign minister at the time] said, “I am the representative of the Turks and the Kurds,” and they use these statements to buttress themselves up. It is as if they are beckoning the ruling classes: see, even Ataturk and Inonu recognized the existence of the Kurds; that’s all that we do too, so what is there to get angry about?

By recognizing the existence of a nation, the revisionist renegades presume that they have the national question resolved (in fact, they, at the moment, recognise the existence of, not the Kurdish nation, but the Kurdish people (!)).... The bourgeoisie of the ruling nation might recognize the existence of other nations and might even grant certain rights when it is in a bind, as does the bourgeoisie in Iraq. But at every opportunity it tramples upon these rights and wants to oppress other nationalities. What distinguishes the communists from the bourgeoisie is not whether to recognise the existence of the minority nationalities.

Be that as it may, in the Sivas Congress, under conditions where there was no such thing as the central state authority and when it had fairly nearly collapsed, M. Kemal wanted essentially to prevent a possible secession movement of the Kurdish nation by hypocritically alluding to the Kurds’ existence. He wanted to bring about a situation where they would reconcile themselves to accepting the yoke of the Turkish bourgeoisie and landlords. M. Kemal’s whole life is full of examples of perpetrating national oppression against the Kurdish nation and the other minority nationalities. If there is anyone in Turkey whom the communists cannot use to support their line on the national question, it is M. Kemal. In fact, the nationalism that needs to be struggled against first and foremost is M. Kemal nationalism, which is dominant nation nationalism. Inonu’s claim in Lausanne that he was also the representative of the Kurds is a blatant attack on the right of the Kurdish nation to self-determination. It is the perfidy of determining the destiny of the Kurdish nation from outside. It is the shrewdness of including the region inhabited by the Kurdish nation within the borders of Turkey, namely the territory under the domination of the Turkish bourgeoisie and landlords through bargaining with the imperialists. And it is Turkish nationalism manifesting itself in a most rapacious form. This is what the revisionist renegades use to buttress themselves up!