

## **Speech by Kemal Okuyan, TKP Secretary General**

Dear comrades,

A century ago, 54 delegates, 35 of whom were entitled to vote, came together in Moscow. They all wished to emancipate humanity from exploitation, to deal a death blow to the rotten social order in which inequality and injustice prevails, to render the struggle of communism that had been ongoing in individual countries a unified force, to extend the energy of the Russian working class who came to power in 1917 to all toiling people of the world and of Europe in particular. The date was March 2, 1919.

As a matter of fact, I might as well say exactly 100 years ago... Because the founding congress of the Communist International, the organization for which hundreds of thousands of people had been proud militants for 24 years at factory benches or strikes, at barricades or Gestapo's dungeons, at parliamentary rostrums or concentration camps, at the Kremlin Palace or the trenches of Volokolamsk, was planned to take place on February 15. Unless the counter-revolutionary gangs at the disposal of reactionary governments which responded the victorious working class with white terror resorted to various intrigues to prevent the delegates from reaching to Moscow.

After all, they neither managed to stop the foundation of the Communist International, nor did they succeed in preventing the family of communist parties, which were quite inexperienced, incidental and ineffective back then to rapidly become one of the most fundamental determinants in the class struggle.

Until it was abolished in 1943, the Comintern had come through numerous hard struggles and achieved phenomenal success. The same period also witnessed several tragic defeats of both the Comintern and member parties. Undoubtedly, the same goes for all episodes of our common history after the Comintern. Today, in embracing this history proudly with its pros and cons, we comradely salute all militants of our noble struggle, especially those who lost their lives in the fight for communism.

While the Comintern was being established, those who believed that the days of capitalism was numbered were predominant. Even the most prudent would not guess that capitalism would continue to exist as a world system a century later. Today, being the humble followers of those who had the will to establish a World Party in 1919, we look back at the past with our steadfast belief in the fact that the bourgeoisie will be defeated and ask to ourselves, "why did it take so long, why has the victory been so late?"

This is rather different than asking “what did we do wrong?” After so many experiences, we have finally learned that when the latter question is put in the center of historical analysis, it sets the ground, provides a pretext for denialism, even for defection. Of course, being aware of the mistakes we made in the past is a duty that we shall not fail to fulfil. However, the first condition of taking a lesson from the past is to relate all of our assessments to the answer of the question “how can we succeed”. For instance, defining the reasons of the demise of the Soviet Union is utterly important to us; yet, the demise of the Soviet Union should neither bring the gains of the October Revolution, nor the achievements of the process of socialist foundation into disrepute.

We may understand what we did wrong if we consider the fact that within the process as a whole, successes and failures constitute a dialectic unity, that sometimes the distinction between subjective errors and objective conditions, even inevitabilities, may become uncertain. If we approach the problem as such, we would not be afraid of our past, we would never resort to denial in shame as some do. If the working class managed to come to power in several countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even more will become true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We look back at the past as we seek ways to carry this claim into effect and we take lessons accordingly.

What we shall say to those who found themselves at the ranks of the rotten social democracy after racking their brains for years around the question “what did we do wrong” is rather simple: we can overcome and correct our mistakes in our path to revolution. But capitalism cannot be corrected; it is in and of itself a historical mistake, an anomaly, a tumor, a freak for the entire humanity. The determination that our comrades had a century ago to overthrow it is still valid: capitalism will be overthrown.

Dear comrades,

During this two-day long conference, we will discuss important episodes of our common history. What we need is a courageous and creative study. It is evident that in terms of the periods and events we are going to address here, utterly sophisticated dynamics had been at work that could not simply be explained by truisms. What will prevent us from getting lost in the woods are the unshakeable principles of Marxism-Leninism, and our main motive in addressing historical events: seizing the opportunities that arise in our fight for communism in the best possible way.

If you will excuse me, as the representative of the hosting party of this conference, I would like to share some of the conclusions we have reached in looking at the history of the world communist movement from today:

1. The center of international working-class movement had changed twice between 1848 and 1917. Even though France was the prominent country between 1848 and 1871, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, the German working-class movement and social democracy became predominant, and it became the indisputable authority within the working-class movement. We should not suggest that the negative outcomes of the authority assumed by German social democracy started only after the dismal betrayal in 1914, i.e. after the alliance of certain social democratic parties with their own bourgeois governments during the war. While the center of gravity of the international working-class movement shifted to Russia with the October Revolution, this did not only imply that the working class which carried out its revolution assumed a well-deserved authority and reputation, but it also implied a break from the far-reaching rottenness and reformist trend that started in the international working-class movement before 1914.

2. We know that by the end of 1918, when Lenin and other Bolsheviks matured the idea to create a new International, they resorted to optimistic notions about the spread of the revolution in Europe, and even in some other regions. Factors such as the immense discontent which emerged in capitalist countries and set large masses of workers in motion, the spread of revolutionary ideas among soldiers in various countries, the fact that conflicts between imperialists became even deeper as the war ended, the emergence of governing crises in several capitalist countries, and the rise of national liberation struggles especially in the colonies of British imperialism were at the root of this optimism. All of these factors were real; hence, taking them into close consideration was not utopianism, but a revolutionary responsibility. However, the problem was that the working class, which was starting to get into action in many countries, was actually under the influence of the social democracy, which had in fact being transformed into bourgeois parties, and the communists were only constituting a small minority among toiling masses.

3. The Communist International was established with very limited resources in 1919. Taking also the picture I summarized just now into account, it would be insufficient to formulate the main objective of the foundation of the Comintern as “coordinating the world revolutionary process through a world party”, for at the beginning of 1919, communist parties lacked the power and maturity to be coordinated. In this respect, one may as well argue that the 3<sup>rd</sup> International was established to challenge the influence of social democracy. Lenin recurrently emphasized that this influence was the major obstacle for revolution in Germany and other countries. Today, the reason why we especially underline the importance of struggling with the social democracy among the reasons for the establishment of the Communist International is quite clear: the fact that “social democracy”, which appears under different names and forms today, cannot be

considered as an alliance issue for the working-class movement, that it constitutes one of the gravest challenges for the revolutionary struggle is being largely ignored. But we shall emphasize over and over again that the foundation of the Communist International was a political and ideological declaration of war against social democracy. The fact that communists had to take certain steps back due to tactical necessities in this war later on does not make any difference.

4. In this connection, the main reason why the working class failed to seize or retain political power, particularly in Germany and in many other countries, was not the strength of counter-revolution per se but rather the services rendered by social democracy to the counter-revolution. This sheer fact, which has been covered up for years among our ranks, should be brought into view once again.

5. We see that communist parties started to gain a certain influence by 1920, but it is also evident that masses of workers in Europe were still under the control of social democracy. Thus, when the idea that revolution may not spread as easily and as early as it was supposed to be was combined with the objective to protect Soviet Russia, where the struggle against both internal and external enemies intensified, in its second year, the Communist International found itself trapped between two different tasks that were difficult to harmonize: the duty to utilize the revolutionary wave in Europe in the best possible way and to protect socialism in one country. Unless this clear tension is well-understood, it would be impossible to comprehend Lenin's pamphlet "Left-Wing Communism", the debates at the Second Congress of the Comintern or the united front against fascism tactics. The necessary steps taken backwards at a time when the requirements of the foundation and protection of socialism in one country became decisive should not be considered as permanent strategic principles. Furthermore, stigmatizing the initiatives and endeavors that aimed to seize political power for the working class in a period when the ebb and flow of the revolutionary wave had been sharp as "adventurism" is simply inappropriate. One shall never dare to question why the objective was to "seize political power" during the sharp struggles which took place in various countries in Europe between 1919 and 1923. What we should question instead are the insufficiency of the preparations, the tactical mistakes of the vanguard or the "premature" blows that it wished to deliver without assessing the balance of forces appropriately.

6. When these mistakes are analyzed more closely, the roles played by many leading cadres in the Bolshevik Party, who were purged later on, attract attention immediately. The inconsistencies and mistakes of Zinoviev and Radek, who were both prominent figures within the structure of the Communist International, of Trotsky, who were not only in charge of the Red Army as the Commissar of War, but also had strong

connections with the movement in Europe, and of Tukhachevsky, who was the commander of the western front during the Polish War which can be seen as an intersection point between the spread of the European Revolution and defending the Soviet Union, should be evaluated openly and without exaggeration. The assertion which claims that the Comintern had an unshakeable political line which was completely independent from individuals has no basis at all. A century later, the errors committed on behalf of the Communist International should be exposed regardless of their signatories, necessary lessons should be taken and the historiography of our movement should not be left to Trotskites and liberals.

7.

For a well-rounded evaluation of our history, the figures and tendencies who or which had been part of the world proletarian movement yet were condemned in different periods of time should be examined more closely. The militants of our parties should become familiar with the names of those, some of whom have frankly betrayed the revolutionary struggle, committed grand mistakes, or historically proven wrong, but all who have taken a side within the discussions of their period. They should become enlightened against the theoretical and practical sources of reformism and liberalism, which even today are in effect to a degree among our ranks.

In this regard, not only those including Lasalle, Bakunin, Bernstein, Kautsky, but also those such as Korsch, Roy, Balabanova, Sultan Galiev, Panakoek should be included in the education of cadres. The works of Lukacs, Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg, who have exhibited conflicting tendencies should be discussed bravely. Otherwise, it will not be possible to fully comprehend the real value of the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin nor the struggle of Stalin.

8. Finally I would like to comment on some of the conclusions to which we have arrived on the relations between communist parties, under the light of the experience of the world communist movement during and after the period of the Communist International. The contributions of the Communist International, and later on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the world communist movement, as well as to the formation and empowerment of parties cannot be underestimated. Yet, the hundred years of experience shows that, we should prioritize the issues such as the political and organisational independence of communist parties and their rights and responsibilities to fulfill the needs of the class struggle by the own resources. This does not exclude the need for solidarity, help, coordination between communist parties, on the contrary, they become even more essential. Similarly, the possibility of establishing the principal of communist parties' making their own strategical and tactical decisions depends on

flourishing a culture of open, sincere and comradely discussion, evaluation and criticism between parties. Not a single communist party can ban other parties from evaluating their positions and struggles, because that their decision making is independent. What matters here is the following: There cannot be created any authority above the will of the party that shoulders the struggle for socialism politically and organisationally and its members. This approach should be taken into account even when a time comes in the future that the communist parties decide to develop a form of an international to blow the final mortal strike to capitalism.

Dear comrades,

While the Communist Party of Turkey has organized the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (SolidNet) in 2015, parliamentary elections were being held in Turkey. We wanted to avoid the meeting to be cancelled because of the elections, which came to effect after a snap decision of the government. In the middle of a very intensive period, our Party hosted the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties. Some of our comrades, assistant of the meeting, had to cast their votes between the sessions of the meeting. Now, four years later, we are hosting a meeting of the European Communist Initiative and again there is an election in front of us. Fortunately, the elections are 40 days ahead and TKP has advanced its power and impact in such a way that we can fulfill our international responsibilities without any interruption of electoral campaign.

The approaching elections are of immense importance for TKP, because there is not a single party other than TKP that questions the capitalist order. The parties are building alliances, one who fails to become the candidate of a party then becomes the candidate of another, different names from different parties are transferred only for the sake of winning the elections of a municipality. Parties that run for the elections follow a different policy in different cities, they cast a nationalist candidate in one city and a liberal in another. A party is asking for votes for five different parties in addition to its own. TKP is staying apart from all this degeneration and is striving for explaining the alternative of socialism to millions of workers that are struck by the economical crisis, and for gaining them to organized struggle. Our Party's candidates will be running for municipality assemblies of the total 81 cities and 821 districts of Turkey in the upcoming local elections. We have candidates for mayors in 81 cities. In about 90 districts, people will have the alternative to vote for TKP's district candidates. Except for six candidates, the whole candidates of TKP are our Party's own candidates, the other six are the candidates of local alliances involving our Party, who will run within TKP's lists.

We are using a slogan once again, which we have used 17 years ago: "If money has its reign, working people have their Communist Party". And we have a second slogan in our propaganda material: We are not on the same boat.

Indeed, we are not on the same boat. We are not on the same boat with exploiters, international monopolies, imperialist centers, nationalists, racists, reactionists nor liberals. That boat, that imprisons billions of people to hunger, poverty and unemployment will be sunk, we will sink it; the boat of the oppressed will pave its way to a world without classes and exploitation.

We can say this with an unshakable belief and self-confidence on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Communist International.

May the future be bright comrades...