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Turkey/Armenia

One hundred years after the Armenian genocide - negationist consensus and internationalist breaches

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“The centenary of that which we cannot talk about . That's what the conference organized in April by the prestigious University of Bogazici (Istanbul) had to be called, since the term “genocide” had to be removed from the title which had been originally planned.

An event that aptly summarizes the taboo character of this word, one hundred years after the massacres suffered by the Armenian people in the framework of the project of extermination orchestrated by the Union and Progress Party leading the Ottoman Empire.

On the left, an increasingly recognized genocide

Yet the claim of the recognition of the reality of the Armenian genocide by the Turkish state is affirmed with increasingly strength by various associations and groups on the left. In addition, commemorations with the participation of several hundred people have taken place for nearly five years, including on Taksim Square in the centre of Istanbul. Also for the first time, a meeting in memory of twenty Armenian revolutionaries of the Hentchak party executed in June 1915 took place in 2013 during the revolt of Gezi. A symbolic but important fact, the name of one of them, Paramaz, was adopted as pseudonym by a young Turkish revolutionary (Suphi Nejat Agirnasli), a volunteer combatant in Kobane who fell during an attack by Daesh.

In addition, the patient work of Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist and intellectual assassinated in 2007, in the framework of the magazine which he directed (“Agos”), as well as numerous publications of works concerning 1915 and the Armenian question (including those of Dadrian, Kevorkian, Ter Minassian and so on) have strongly contributed to engaging a debate on the claim for recognition of the genocide and making public the problems of Armenians in Turkey.

A negationist state

As for the Turkish state, the attitude concerning the denial of the genocide has not changed. The fact that last year, former Prime Minister Erdogan presented his condolences to the “small children” of Armenians who lost their lives in 1915 and says that it is a duty to commemorate their suffering is of course a first and represents an important act, but one which stops at the threshold of the use of the “word” and therefore of the recognition of the real character of the massacres.

But the behaviour and discourse of Erdogan as Turkish president and that of the government (to which he is completely subservient), in the face of the term “genocide” pronounced by Pope Francis and the resolution adopted by the European Parliament recognizing the genocidal nature of the murderous acts of 1915, reveals the fact that the condolences of 2014 had no other purpose than to attempt to seduce the European governments and the European Union on the eve of the centenary.

The new strategy of the AKP now resides in the redefinition of the historic significance of the year 2015, presented as the centenary of the battle of the Dardanelles where the Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire faced the invaders,

thereby transforming a sequence of the First World War into a heroic anti-imperialist story, obscuring the alliance of the Ottoman State with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. And the fact that the date chosen for the official ceremony of commemoration of this battle coincides with that of the genocide (April 24) smacks of a mediocre ruse, even for the AKP cadres.

An internationalist battle to lead

Negationism is not the exclusive preserve of the AKP and is also the main inviolable red line of their main opponents, namely the extreme right (naturally) and the Kemalist-secular centre-left. The president of the Kemalist CHP, the main opposition party in Parliament, has even mentioned the possibility of drafting a text in common with the AKP concerning the resolution of the European Parliament, which would be inconceivable on any other subject. Only the Democratic People's Party (HDP, linked to the Kurdish movement) escapes this consensus and did not hesitate to use the word "Armenian genocide" in tabling proposals for laws requiring the state to apologize officially for the acts of 1915, or even to recognize the role of the Kurds in the looting and massacres.

Even if a significant part of the revolutionary left still prefers to approach this thorny question carefully (or not to deal with it at all), it is indisputable that the recognition of the genocide is or should be a crucial issue for any internationalist current which is the bearer of a project of social emancipation. It is only by reconstructing history from the point of view of the vanquished of yesterday, remembering the image of these "enslaved ancestors" of which Walter Benjamin spoke, that it will be possible to build a future free of any relations of domination, where the field of the possible no longer includes barbarism.

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