

# On Sub-imperialism: Regional Power Turkey

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# On Sub-imperialism: Regional Power Turkey

The subject of sub-imperialism involves controversial dimensions that are offshoots of differences on how to understand imperialism or globalisation. There have been erroneous political attitudes on the part of the world left in general and Turkish left in particular because of ruling out the distinction between the colonial and imperialist stages of capitalism. One expression of such attitudes has been to brand the countries such as Brazil , Argentina and Turkey as semi-colonies or neo-colonies. While these positions prevailed for many years they have recently been refurbished and popularised in the context of the debates on globalisation. A typical example of this is to deny that globalisation under capitalism is a more developed state of imperialism and present it as a new stage of “empire”.

The source of such views boosting third-worldist approaches has been western academicians who pass themselves generally as Marxists. These positions mingling with traditional Stalinist left’s national developmentalist socialism created and fed petty-bourgeois left currents in countries like Turkey . And today, as if justifying the saying “history is but repetition”, relations of inequality in capitalist world are still being presented as a kind of “neo-colonialism” and thus the modus operandi of fallacies of petty-bourgeois left positions is maintained in the same way.

Actually those left groups deserve to be called “conservative” and not “revo-

lutionary”, because they have not drawn lessons from so many upheavals and important developments ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union and alike and they have not settled accounts with their past and mistakes. And this is not relevant only to Turkey . Reflections of this are possible to see all around the world. However it is obvious that it is a graver problem in Turkey where petty-bourgeois left tendencies are so widespread and established due to historical and social peculiarities of Turkey .

It is crucial to understand correctly the change the capitalist countries such as Turkey have passed through within the global workings of capitalism. Although dependent on imperialist powers Turkey has now become a sub-imperialist country where capitalism has developed with leaps and bounds. As a consequence of this process of change the bourgeoisie in Turkey has been experiencing pains of a skin change. The infighting within the bourgeois power bloc that has been going on for long is a reflection of this. Today the Turkish bourgeoisie is basically divided into two in terms of perceiving the outstanding problems in Turkish and world politics and thus developing corresponding political attitudes.

Although there are a variety of positions involving many nuances we can broadly designate the two sides as pro-status quo and liberal. The liberal front pushes for a route required by the level the Turkish capitalism has reached and the need for expansion. The pro-status quo military-civil layers, as the conservative force of the bourgeois political arena, have not given up resisting despite they are weakened as a result of the pressure exerted by economic necessities. As can be easily understood from never-ending tensions in Turkish political life such points of resistance continue to serve as hindrances to working out immediate and smooth political solutions to economic requirements.

Clever representatives of the bourgeoisie are well aware that it is imperative to overcome these hindrances in order to propel Turkish capitalism further. As to the working class front, in order to conduct an effective revolutionary struggle against capitalism, it is an absolute necessity for its vanguard revolutionary forces to assess the realities of the world and country free of petty-bourgeois clichés.

## What does sub-imperialism mean?

We dealt with the characteristics of imperialist-capitalism elsewhere at length and pointed out the differences of this highest stage of capitalist development with the period of colonialism (Elif Çağlı, *From Colonialism to Imperialism*). And we also emphasized that to understand and acknowledge that imperialist expansionism and colonialist expansionism are not same is very important from the standpoint of the strategy of proletarian revolutionary struggle.

Let us remind briefly the basic characteristics of the imperialist stage of capitalism. Imperialism is the capitalist world system based on the supremacy of finance-capital. Imperialism is a mode of expansionism rising above monopoly competition. Distinct from the period of capitalist colonialism, imperialist competition is driven not by a quest for dividing the world along territorial lines but essentially for dividing spheres of influence where finance-capital would have a free hand. In its imperialist stage capitalism seeks to overcome the contradiction between the internationalisation of productive forces and nation-state through the global mobility of finance-capital.

If we are to define imperialist-capitalism in terms of this latter feature which has become more outstanding in today's world, we can say that this highest stage of capitalism means global economy that functions on the basis of the law of uneven and combined development. Capitalist world system constitutes a pyramid of hierarchy whose ranks are broadly described as "advanced, medium and underdeveloped" and various capitalist countries are ranked throughout this pyramid according to their might. In the highest rank of this pyramid of powers are advanced capitalist countries that we describe as imperialist and there is not much controversy about this category. The most controversial rank in this pyramid is the medium developed capitalist countries which show an upward mobility, thus exhibiting a wide range of level differences.

To try to conceive the different stages of development of a socio-economic process as fixed and isolated would result in seeking to set extremely strict, vulgar and mechanic boundaries between medium-level developed capitalist countries and those countries described as imperialist. It is impossible for those who view reality through their narrow prisms to grasp the changes that have been taking place. They are unable to see and understand or unwilling

to accept that medium-level developed capitalist countries have been making moves toward becoming imperialist, and passed through processes of structural change along this way. Yet for those who approach the subject matter in a dialectical manner it is clear that capitalism is not stationary in those countries that lay at different ranks of development in the hierarchical pyramid (top, middle, bottom). Different socio-economic structures are generally in motion (upwards, and sometimes downwards).

A deeper analysis will break the clichés. For instance, it is actually not to the interest of imperialist countries to keep a dependent country economically in a state of inactivity and backwardness, a mere source of raw material like in the period of colonialism. In imperialist era economic interrelations between diverse capitalist countries are indispensable to turn the wheels of the economy. It is necessary for the capitalist market to flourish in all countries not just in developed capitalist countries.

Therefore the idea that imperialism completely retards those countries outside developed capitalist countries in an economic sense is in accordance with neither realities nor Marxist analyses. Imperialist-capitalism reflects interdependence of capitalist countries of different levels through unequal relations. And it is only with the maturing of the imperialist stage that the fact that capitalism is a world system, an economic system that creates a global operation, acquires its full meaning.

Whole historical record from across the world since the midst of twentieth century confirms this. During these years many countries of varying sizes changed politically and economically, though unevenly and through crises due to the laws of operation of capitalist system. Nation states were built in colonial countries and a capitalist market set to develop. As in the example of Turkey in some big countries that had been once fallen into a semi-colony position, new capitalist nation-states have accomplished considerable economic development. Thus colonial and semi-colonial countries of the past took their places in the pyramid of imperialist-capitalist system as underdeveloped or medium-level developed capitalist countries. And those countries like India, Brazil and Turkey that are big and geostrategically important, with time, have lifted themselves to the level of regional powers.

Capitalism is an economic system which cannot subsist without competition on a national and global level between capitals of diverse kinds and composi-

tions. Capitalist competition creates capitalist monopoly and in the imperialist era which is dominated by monopolistic relations competition rises to higher levels. Thus monopolistic competition among groups of big capital comes to the fore. And in the imperialist era economy gets diversified not only in most developed countries but also in other capitalist countries. With varying ways and paces pre-capitalist production relations get liquidated and capitalist production relations develop in different countries.

As a consequence of this change monopoly capitalism can prevail even in countries which used to be questioned whether they were capitalist or not, and some of them can even become sub-imperialist powers. No need go far to see this. Turkey which was once an underdeveloped capitalist country became one of the medium-level developed capitalist countries as a result of feverish capitalist development after 1960. And after 1980 there was a process of feverish structural change in the direction of opening up towards outside world under extraordinary bourgeois regimes which created a nearly trouble-free environment for capital by repressing the working class and toiling masses. In consequence Turkey climbed upwards among medium-level capitalist countries and became a sub-imperialist country.

The concept sub-imperialism defines a position below the imperialist countries that occupy the higher steps of the imperialist pyramid of hierarchy. Although a sub-imperialist country is not yet as economically powerful as those countries in the upstairs and not as influential as them in determining the world agenda, it conducts directly expansionist relations in its own region in the company of big imperialist powers. That is why the countries that reach this level by climbing upwards among medium-level developed countries are qualified as sub-imperialist.

It is obvious that there is a certain loosening of dependence of a sub-imperialist country upon imperialist countries in comparison to other capitalist countries that are not at this level of development. Those capitalist countries that have reached the level of regional powers can sometimes defy big powers to move more independently in their own interests. With time the form and nature of their relations with big imperialist powers develops to their advantage. For instance while they were once just simple policeman of big powers in their own regions now they seek to move along with big powers for the purpose of quenching their expansionist appetite.

Although sub-imperialist countries are not yet so powerful as to command on a global scale they can really constitute a centre of power in their own regions. There is no doubt that this situation lays the objective basis for rivalry between countries of similar situation in the same region. For instance the situation of Argentine and Brazil in South America or of Turkey and Iran in the Middle East reflects this kind of objective ground for rivalry. These kinds of regions always bear the potential for conflict and friction on the basis of ambitions for expansion. Reminiscent of the rivalry between Ottoman and Persian empires in history, Turkey and Iran, the heirs of these empires respectively, have their expansionist claims over the region.

## **Mindlessness of petty-bourgeois left**

It is very important to grasp the laws of operation of capitalism, features of the system and that imperialism is a different stage than colonialism in order to analyse the situation of countries like Turkey in a correct and satisfactory way. To repeat, imperialist-capitalism produces interdependence on the basis of inequality. Therefore problems emerging from unequal positions and possibility of powerful ones to intervene in less powerful ones economically and politically do not go away. Yet, capitalist nation-states in general and sub-imperialist ones in particular have also their own spheres of economic and political operation in their own rights. Therefore, to characterise these countries still as semi-colony (or neo-colony/modern colony etc.) would be a big error or falsification.

These approaches imposed by third-worldist academics in the West upon left movements in various countries serve as a distracting factor in the struggle of the working class against capitalism. Turkish left has also its share from such diversions. The petty-bourgeois narrow-mindedness manifests itself especially in the lack of capacity to grasp the laws of operation of imperialist-capitalist system and the situation of medium and lower level developed capitalist countries.

Petty-bourgeois left's objections against Marxist analyses (in this context the analysis of sub-imperialism) which aim at establishing the level of capitalist development of countries such as Turkey do not rest on a scientific ground and an effort to understand the day. Their approach is completely driven by a nationalist-left mindset. And basically it reflects petty-bourgeoisie's non-rev-

olutionary reactive attitude in the face of capitalist development. In general petty-bourgeois left's political positions are not based upon an understanding of the contradiction between fundamental classes of capitalism. Instead, they subscribe to a kind of would-be anti-imperialism in a conception of struggle based on contradictions derived from inequalities between different capitalist countries.

One of the typical features of nationalist left is that they analyse developments by detaching them from class axis and instead make their assessments around an axis of "weak-strong" in a way to reflect the mindset of petty-bourgeoisie. Therefore nationalist left currents cannot develop a consistent revolutionary attitude against capitalism or imperialism even when they assume revolutionary appearances. Typical reflection of this is to shift towards the position of defending "national" capital against foreign capital in weeping for the situation of countries like Turkey that are considered "weak" as they are below the level of big imperialist powers. It is precisely this petty-bourgeois nationalist frame of mind which lays beneath the objections against calling sub-imperialist a capitalist country like Turkey which has been persecuting the oppressed Kurdish nation for years and seeks to be a big power in its region.

Leaving aside the falsifications and focusing on the fact of the matter, domestic and international realities have long invalidated the arguments of the nationalist left. But petty-bourgeois mindlessness is a chronic disease and those who suffer from this disease always prove unable to recover and accept reality. One of the important issues to be underlined in this context is that the petty-bourgeois take unequal relations between different capitalist countries as a kind of relations of exploitation and be obsessed with it. Yet within imperialist-capitalist hierarchy the relations between "the high and low" or "the weak and strong" do not reflect a relation of exploitation but of inequality and hegemony.

Capitalist countries or capitalist powers of different levels of development do not exploit one another. They altogether exploit the working class. But they share the surplus value according to the might and size of their investments or capital. Therefore, to depict the relation between different capitalist states with different size and power as a relation of exploitation wherein the big exploit the weak, and conclude an artificial conception of anti-imperialism is

incompatible with the revolutionary outlook of the working class.

In conclusion, petty-bourgeois left's "anti-imperialism" is a would-be anti-imperialism which does not have a radical attitude against domestic capitalism thus lacking an anti-capitalist content and is reduced merely to a foreign factor! On the part of the petty-bourgeoisie anti-imperialism is consisted of taking an attitude against colonialist and annexationist "policies". However there cannot be an anti-imperialist struggle without anti-capitalism. And a conception of struggle against capitalism torn from revolutionary class axis would be surrendering to petty-bourgeois and nationalist left frames of mind.

As evidenced concretely by Turkey, sub-imperialist countries generally move along with a big imperialist power in ongoing imperialist scrambles for re-division in various regions of the world. As a general rule big share goes to the big partner, but it should not be forgotten that the lesser ones also get their share. Thus the relation between imperialist countries and sub-imperialist countries is a relation of partnership in exploiting. A concrete expression of this is the institutions of economic cooperation or strategic partnerships which gather advanced and medium-level capitalist countries under the same roof. It is obvious that this situation has nothing to do with the "dependence relation" in the colonial era and "the collaborationist bourgeoisie".

The relation between Turkey and the USA is a case in point. First of all, the Turkish bourgeoisie has a sufficient level of consciousness of "national independence" to seek its country's capitalist development. This bourgeoisie does not seek to have strategic partnership with the USA for the purpose of selling Turkey out. On the contrary, conscious of the fact that a more powerful capitalist Turkey is in the interests of itself, it wants to do business in company with big powers. Nevertheless there is no lack of political tendencies which try to depict the relation between Turkey and the USA as a kind of "national dependence" or "relation between an oppressor country and an oppressed country". Such political tendencies let themselves fall into a position of disregarding, more or less, their "own" sub-imperialist bourgeois' expansionist ambitions and moves.

Nationalist leftism has got a typical feature to be underlined. By nature it eventually puts the imperialist-capitalism's blame essentially on "foreign" bourgeois, overtly or covertly. Thus, regardless of their intentions, such nationalist left tendencies clear, more or less, their "own" bourgeois of the blame. For

instance they always blame IMF, NATO etc. in a perception of foreign enemy. This approach obscures the fact that the Turkish bourgeoisie is a direct part of these imperialist-capitalist institutions. Yet, for instance, as far as NATO is concerned, the message that needs to be conveyed to the masses is: “Don’t look for NATO outside, it’s inside!” Likewise, it cannot be only the IMF to blame for austerity policies workers and toilers are subjected to as a response to capitalist crises. A left movement that disregards the real enemy, that is the enemy within, the native bourgeoisie, and that does not wage struggle against its “own” bourgeoisie is not revolutionary in a proletarian sense.

Nationalist leftists seek to portray a country like Turkey as “oppressed” to be defended against imperialism. Yet Turkey is now in the seventeenth place in terms of economic size in the list of capitalist countries and it has big capitalist corporations, monopolies making investments all over the world. Turkey is not a “modern colony” but a sub-imperialist country, a regional power. Besides having an outstanding and big army capitalist Turkish state is one of the biggest purchasers of arms in the world.

The Turkish army which is part of NATO and has been thoroughly structured by it since 1950’s took part in imperialist powers’ re-division wars such as the Korean War in 1950’s, and Bosnian and Kosovo wars in recent times. But as the Turkish bourgeoisie gets strengthened in economic and military respects it becomes no more satisfied with the mere role of a gendarmerie of the USA in the region. Now it aims to get benefit and upper hand from the designs of the USA like the Greater Middle East Initiative or EU partnership, in a framework where its own plans are also taken into account.

That is why the capitalist Turkish state takes side with great powers like the USA in imperialist wars of division and sends troops to countries like Afghanistan and Somali under the so-called guise of “Peace Force”. Or as in the example of Iraq war, without assuming the risk of directly extending its own hands into the fire of war, it seeks to get big shares from the cake of capitalist reconstruction of areas devastated by the imperialist war.

Beside these facts there are some burning questions which have now turned into basic criteria to test whether there is a revolutionary and internationalist attitude is taken or not in a country like Turkey . No one can pursue an internationalist revolutionary policy by ignoring the facts such as the military interventions of the Turkish bourgeoisie carried out in its own interests, the

case of Cyprus which has been for years forced to live under the shadow of Turkish military troops, the unjust war against Kurdish nation and, as extension of it, the attacks against Northern Iraq by the Turkish army etc.

Petty-bourgeois lefts' argument that countries like Turkey are under the yoke of imperialist powers like the USA and EU and their posture of revolutionism over this rhetoric has in fact no significance at all. The working class as a whole is under the yoke of capitalists regardless of their being native or foreign. And the capitalist class, as if emphasizing that this is the rule of capitalism, sees no reason to refrain from demanding more "yoke" when they are in anticipation of more economic gain.

Accordingly, the failure of the government to pass the March 2003 motion (to allow the US troops to pass from Turkish soil, open a northern front to Iraq and join the invasion) from the Assembly, which had been brought into the agenda by the upcoming invasion of Iraq by the US, was regarded by the petty-bourgeois left as a gain, while the TÜSİAD (Turkish Businessman Association) chair considered this a big loss. The real masters of capitalist Turkey, the big capital, were very regretful as there were not enough concessions given to the US. The petty-bourgeois left, on the other hand, regarded the US expectations from Turkey as if an attempt of imperialism to occupy Turkey.

As proved by all similar examples, petty-bourgeois lefts' attempt to interfere with the affairs of big capital and hope that they can act independently from the US is futile. What the petty-bourgeois leftism does not (want to) understand is that a sub-imperialist country's dependence on a big imperialist power is something quite beyond being its mere gendarmerie.

Turkey is a strange country in comparison to the Western capitalist countries. Although capitalism belatedness of which marked the modern history of this country has later registered a big development by leaps and bounds, politics has never kept in pace with economy. In countries with such a disparity between economy and politics class lines cannot be discerned easily. Here is a striking example: while the bourgeoisie in Turkey is in favour of leaving behind the period of "nationalism" (protectionist economic policies based on home market) and integration into foreign capital and thus transcending nationalism economically, the role of defending "independence" which is nothing but a nationalist capitalist development is left to the petty-bourgeois left.

As this frame of mind is so strong within Turkish left, it sounds a bit discomfoting in Turkey to voice the revolutionary working class position. Scientific expression of living facts and Marxist analyses appear strange to Turkish left in general. In order not to be abstract let us give some concrete examples. It appears as something of a defence of imperialism to petty-bourgeois left when you try to stress that there cannot be an independent capitalism in this age, that he who does not reject capitalism as a whole must accordingly accept relations of dependence as a rule of this economic system. Petty-bourgeois left would be extremely reluctant to accept that the period of national developmentalism under the guidance of Kemalism and state-founder military-civil bureaucracy has long been gone. While Turkish capitalism seeks to impose its will as a regional power at the stage of sub-imperialism, the petty-bourgeois lefts want us to believe that Turkey is a “semi-colonial” country!

The USA does not push Turkey by means of armed force applied by a colonialist power to do joint work and military interventions in the Middle East, in Iraq etc. On the contrary, it is the Turkish big bourgeoisie who is eager to build close ties with the US in anticipation of “investing one and gaining three” and acts eagerly. That is, within the framework of capitalism the USA does not need to occupy Turkey at all to do joint work! But the petty-bourgeois leftists are very reluctant to accept all these facts. Because they are quite aware of the fact that when they accept these facts they would lose their position of bogus “anti-imperialism” which serves to pass nationalism off as something revolutionary.

In fact in a country which has reached to the level of a regional capitalist power, petty-bourgeois leftism’s “anti-imperialism” and “national developmentalism” means backing one’s own expansionist bourgeoisie. In the final analysis there can be no other explanation for not putting forward the demand of putting an immediate end to capitalism but insisting on a demand like “independent Turkey”. It is necessary to remind petty-bourgeois lefts that a genuine anti-imperialist attitude has nothing to do with nationalism. The point where they have drifted makes it necessary to express this bluntly.

Continuing its walk on a political ground paved with misconceptions petty-bourgeois leftism has become totally outdated and degenerated over time. And those petty-bourgeois left tendencies which went greater lengths in this unacceptable course than others have shifted towards social-chauvinist, and

in some cases even fascistic, positions. For instance, backing the military, the putschist forces, etc. who deceive people with the pretence of anti-Americanism has nothing to do with revolutionism or left politics in favour of oppressed masses. Likewise, from the standpoint of the interests of the working masses or revolutionism there can be no justifiable reason for taking side with Ergenekonist gangs under the guise of protecting secularity. There is burning need today in Turkey that these facts have to be voiced aloud to strengthen the revolutionary struggle.

## Turkey the regional power

Turkey has gone great length since the turn of 1980 as a result of the structural change carried out by the bourgeoisie in the direction of integration into the world economy. The economy grew and Turkey has become a sub-imperialist country. But Turkey has not yet reached the position of a big power on a par with higher imperialist countries in terms of orienting capital exports and capital movements on a global scale. However Turkey is a very important market in terms of attracting hot money and other capital movements. Such a huge inflow of money gives, in a sense, a richer outlook to Turkish economy than it really is.

And in a time when capitalism is in a great system crisis on a world scale this situation heats the Turkish economy and makes it extremely sensitive and fragile in the face of sudden movements of global stock exchanges. Despite the current rosy picture drawn by bourgeois circles and the AKP government about Turkish economy this is what these hard facts indicate.

Processes of fast capitalist development take place with accompanying changes and pains in both realms of reshaping of capital and politics on a national and international level. This is what happened and is still happening in Turkey . To put it in essential terms, every political status quo is, in the final analysis, a reflection of given historical-economic structural conditions. Once there are certain substantial changes in these conditions then there will be need for new political openings and new concepts. And the strife within the ruling class that has been taking place in recent period in Turkish political life is essentially a product and expression of these facts.

The recent period in Turkey brings about serious points of tension in terms

of the change in the inner structuring of big capital. Thus the strife within the ruling class does not spring only from disagreements existing on the level of political representatives and institutions. There are conflicts between groups of capital that can be distinguished broadly as old and new (or nascent) in terms of their times and forms of initial formation and political traditions. And this situation greatly adds into the intensity and complexity of the process of conflict within the ruling class. The process of old groups of capital coming to terms with nascent groups of capital and thus the process of new syntheses in the bourgeois upper echelons is going on in a painful way. But in the period of AKP governments this side of the matter remained a bit obscured as the conflicts going on within the bourgeois camp is marked with the political polarisation in the form of “secularists/Islamists”.

There are important differences in terms of political structuring and tradition between “old” groups of capital which have thrived over many years under state protectionism and “new” groups of capital which have made great progress in recent period and are generally called “Anatolian capital”. The army or the military tutelage regime is a traditional comrade in arms with the “old” groups of capital, called upon by them to the rescue when they are in trouble. Yet the situation with the “new” groups of capital the roots of which are based on Islamic circles and the Anatolian capital is different. In their course of thriving these groups of capital have always been treated like step-children in political life by the army and military regimes. They have been regarded as too much provincial and excluded by big capital circles like TUSİAD.

But the situation has eventually begun to change under AKP government. This period is a period in which “new” groups of capital are trying to gain a first class place among big capital circles and its political representatives at the heights of the state. This situation creates serious tensions within bourgeois upper echelons and these tensions are revealed by crises erupted on the level of the executive, legislative and mostly judicial branches.

And there is another important thing not to be missed. “Secularist” capital circles that have been living on very friendly terms with the state-founder bureaucracy for many years assume different attitudes than the “Islamic” groups of capital in the face of such crises. It is clear that on matters that create crises at high echelons “old” groups of capital make terms with the pro-status quo bureaucracy more easily on account of the fear that economy could be

influenced badly. “New” groups of capital, on the other hand, could take an adverse attitude against the military-civil bureaucracy when needed as it is a vital problem from the standpoint of their own interests and political traditions.

Because of the despotic-statist tradition Turkey’s prevailing official history is quite different in comparison to the western countries. There are serious differences between official discourse and facts in this country in terms of even naming and analysing things in bourgeois political arena. For instance, if you look at the official discourse, he who defends Kemalist secularism is regarded as modern, democrat even revolutionary. Yet, this line which is represented for many years by the military-civil bureaucracy and the state party, i.e. the CHP, in politics, is pro-status quo and politically reactionary.

And those “out-of-centre” sections who have been constantly tried to be kept away from political life by the Kemalist bureaucracy who branded them “reactionary” for many years, created a political current and forces that want an end to the military tutelage regime and defend liberalism to that extent. Moreover, those political parties, the main example being the Democratic Party (DP) of the 1950’s and AKP the most recent one, which contain this feature have received overwhelming majority’s vote and formed bourgeois governments.

It is from this perspective that we need to look at today’s realities. True, military-civil bureaucracy is pro-status quo and reactionary. And the AKP exhibits a liberal political quality with its apparently populist aspects vis-à-vis Kemalist state-worshipping and opposition to traditional statist status quo. With these qualities AKP has overwhelmingly outflanked the defunct statist parties like CHP which are exposed in political arena. And on the basis of the same qualities it managed to present itself as liberal-democrat and on the side of poor popular masses. It goes without saying that all these appearances are but illusions.

Here is the fact of the matter: had there not been a peculiar question as military tutelage regime in Turkey the lack of bourgeois democratic notions and political liberalism on the part of the AKP and political circles that rely on it would easily be revealed. AKP is not the representative or protector of the working masses but a bourgeois party proper. And a genuine party of big capital voicing the interests of nascent groups of capital thrived on the basis

of a wild exploitation of the working class.

These nascent groups of big capital and their political spokesmen or representatives form those bourgeois forces craving for imperialist expansionism in the region along with the accompanying theses of neo-Ottomanism now popular. On the other hand these imperial ambitions cannot simply be regarded as an empty reflection of nostalgia. Despite the intense infighting going on within the ruling class, the economic driving forces behind this ambition for expansion have made the AKP government proceed a long way towards integration into the world economy. No matter what adverse reactions AKP receive on the part of would-be secularist groups of big capital and those who support military tutelage regime, it is the AKP government that eventually managed to represent a bigger scale Turkish capitalism overall.

The issue of “strategic partnership” which has been recently voiced also by the US ruling circles has got a real substance within the framework of the role Turkey is considered to play. AKP presents and upholds this situation as a demonstration of its success. This attitude is an indication of Turkey’s ambition to consolidate its sub-imperialist position. The fact that Ahmet Davutoğlu who is known as the real architect of AKP’s foreign policy was sworn in as foreign minister is also a step in this direction.

AKP and its milieu are now proud of the process of Turkey’s transformation into a sub-imperialist power ceasing to be a peripheral country. As a matter of fact this process has actually begun in Özal period. The new war of division stretching out from Balkans to the Middle East and Turkic republics that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the now sub-imperialist Turkey’s plans for expansion. And the ideological disguise of the new bourgeois sections’ move for expansion over these regions has become neo-Ottomanism.

## **Belated liberalism**

The development of capitalism in Turkey took a different path from the classical path in the West. It is not the civil political forces that marked the foundation of the bourgeois republic, but mainly the military bureaucracy. For this reason the bourgeois regime in this land has never worked like the bourgeois democracy in the West. Whenever felt in trouble in the face of any escalation

of the struggle of the working class and the toiling masses, the bourgeoisie has called on the military to its rescue and abandoned the political arena to an extra-ordinary form of regime wherein the military rules supreme. It was also the case when the bourgeoisie carried on its affairs taking refuge behind its traditional saviour, i.e. the military, and the military-fascist regime throughout the period of feverish structural change of Turkish capitalism in the 1980's. It is common place that the military tutelage regime which constitutes the peculiarity of Turkish political life has by no means arisen recently.

In Western countries, which are the classical terrain of capitalist development, the political sphere has taken shape and served as a means to develop capitalist private property and civil society as an expression of it. But in Turkey the traditional bourgeois political sphere has generally been hostile to civil society and supported only a kind of capitalist process of development which is under state protection. This mode and structuring of politics which is an extension of the tradition of despotic state tradition has increasingly become hindrance to changing needs of Turkish capitalism and the new process underway.

The need to overcome this hindrance is the real motive behind the fact that certain sections of the bourgeoisie in Turkey has begun to defend civil politics, which is very late in comparison to the Western countries. On the same historical ground, let alone the fact that Turkish capitalism has been unable to create a Social-Democratic Party, it has not even given chance for a liberal tendency to develop in the political sphere.

In fact it is only after structural economic change carried out under extraordinary regimes in the wake of 1980 that the bourgeois circles took up and promoted these issues in the form of debates. It is quite opportune here to remind our analyses on this aspect of the process going on in Turkey . (For an extensive reading see E.Çağlı, Bonapartizmden Faşizme [From Bonapartism to Fascism])

When we look into the period preceding the 12 September military-fascist coup we see that the big bourgeoisie with its various elements in manufacturing, commerce, banking etc. was now more strengthened and fully established in a synthesis of finance-capital. 1980 is a crucial turning point which sets the scene for finance-capital to force all realms of life under its hegemony through its octopus-like tentacles and the long-craved leap forward towards

foreign markets.

At this turning point big capital made its preparations for a fully-fledged blow to overcome the hindrances in its way to accomplish a huge capitalist breakthrough inside and go outside at full speed to foreign markets. From the standpoint of finance-capital which has now fully grown and become hegemonic it became inevitable to overcome the bottleneck created by the mode of accumulation based on domestic market and carry out structural changes. Because, coupled with the tendency of recession in world capitalism at the time, the structural crisis of Turkish capitalism created by its long-time autarchic mode of operation now became mature and the heap of problems reached to great dimensions as the solution had been delayed.

Because of the severe tension between its quest for a breakthrough and the existing situation, big capital went into offensive in all fronts, economic, political, etc. And while it started its move of structural change by the January 24 Decisions to remove the hindrances on its way, on the other hand it aimed to stop the rise of the working class movement and end the revolutionary situation that threatened the bourgeois order through the military regime of 12 September. The 12 September fascism was a serious blow hard to recover from, resulting in the working class being atomized, intimidated and made deeply fearful of organised struggle.

The role of the military in the political life of Turkey , which had already been a major one, has become more intense and consolidated with the 12 September regime. With the blows inflicted by the military bureaucracy to the parliamentary regime and the new legislation brought by it (the 1982 constitution being the foremost which is still in effect) they aimed to construct such a military dictatorship that would guarantee the role of the military in political life as if almost eternally. This situation has resulted in a strengthened position of the military chiefs in politics that has been going on for so many years despite the fact that by 1983 elections the military junta seemingly abandoned power leaving it to parliament.

There are important issues not to be overlooked when we discuss the 12 September regime. The end of fascism in Turkey does not resemble the processes in Spain , Greece , Portugal or some Latin American countries. There was a blow coming from below in these countries when the fascist dictatorships got weakened, which was not the case in Turkey . Likewise, there were other

things that were lacked in Turkey which happened in those countries, such as a mass movement of toilers, revolutionary uprisings or feverish mobilisation of political forces to divert such a kind of rise from the road of revolution and revive bourgeois democracy.

In cases where masses revolted to overthrow the fascist military dictatorship, the putschist generals were brought to the court with the force of the wave of revolt. But the fascist putschists in Turkey have shifted to their comfortable resort places with swollen wallets obtained thanks to state posts.

In the aftermath of the 1983 parliamentary elections when neo-liberal winds were blown throughout the world Özal was at the steering wheel of economy. He was now the prime-minister and had been the architect of the January 24 Decisions. And the rules of the economy that had been in the list of un-touchables for long were changed according to the demands of TÜSİAD. For instance nationalist and protective measures such as the law that protects the Turkish currency was abolished and the regime of foreign trade was liberalised. Under Özal, at the expense of decomposing society, Turkish capitalism underwent a structural change (going international, a deeper integration into imperialist system) in the interests of finance-capital.

Turkey's peculiarities are no secret. Military chiefs have always been at the centre of politics which is unprecedented in European countries. This military bureaucracy has always regarded bourgeois civil attempts to lessen its role in politics as a domestic threat to the regime and has taken a stand against such attempts. When we consider the period since 1980 it is in a sense indeed difficult to pinpoint when the extraordinary mode of rule of the bourgeoisie ends and when the ordinary bourgeois parliamentary regime begins in Turkey, which is different from European countries.

Hence after 1983 we had a kind of bourgeois rule with a parliamentary mechanism on the one hand and those institutions and practices established by the extraordinary regime on the other hand, which on the whole was a freak of nature, up until the general elections of 2002. In other words the Turkish parliamentary system, which already had a crippled democratic content in comparison to the Western European examples, was much more crippled due to the impact of the 12 September regime up until the elections on 3 November 2002. And broad popular masses taught a lesson to those political parties whom they see as representatives of the statist, oppressing and pro-status quo

forces by bringing AKP to power.

While these times seem to have gone it must not be forgotten that the big bourgeoisie and its organisations like TÜSİAD were the main supporters of the fascist dictatorship headed by the military junta and subsequently the Bonapartist regime under Özal. These forces watched in happiness and submission the moves carried out by the extraordinary regimes to open up the economy and suppress the revolutionary movement and the workers' movement.

Speaking of the past, there is another important fact not to be forgotten. While the fascist regime was in the process of being liquidated the bourgeois order in Turkey began to be rocked by the national liberation movement of the oppressed Kurdish nation. Coward and cruel Turkish bourgeoisie did not speak of democracy and speak up for a long time with the hope that its holy army would suppress this movement. However the surfacing of Kurdish question, which the Turkish state had refrained to face thanks to the bloody policy of suppression for many years, changed all given political balances and paradigms, and worked as a historical-social catalyst.

Complaints of big capital organisations about the military tutelage regime that marked the political history of the country have begun to surface only after this regime began to act as a hindrance for their interests. The fact that voices have started to be heard from among the bourgeoisie arguing for a European model of bourgeois democracy in Turkey is an expression of this fact. There is also a tendency of political liberalism flourishing in this terrain with certain writers and publications taking the lead.

There is no doubt that when groups of big capital speak of democratisation what they mean is creation of a political atmosphere that would save them from autarchy and enable them to open up towards outside world. And the extent to which they are interested in certain grave problems that have turned into gangrene is determined by that. This kind of class interests lie behind the "democratisation" drive pursued by the TÜSİAD bourgeoisie, which is completely geared to the EU and extremely inconsistent.

The kind of wider democracy that could only be achieved through the struggle of the working class, revolutionaries, Kurdish people is no doubt ruled out of the content of the "democratisation" package of the big bourgeoisie! On the

contrary, the attitude of the big capital circles on the democratic openings is extremely shifty and erratic due to the class worries for a possible rise of mass struggles for these demands. In any case it is completely misplaced to expect an extensive and consistent attitude from a pure big capital organisation like TÜSİAD.

TÜSİAD still has a shifty attitude and frequently changes discourse according to the situation of the nonconformist struggle and the conjunctural priorities of the infighting going on within the bourgeoisie. Liberal left columnists, on the other hand, expect a determined and consistent attitude from TÜSİAD over democratic reforms. Yet nowhere on earth organisations of big capital have such an attitude over these kinds of issues. They need democracy only as long as, and in so far as, it guarantees and increases their profits. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the positions of liberal left writers who have been pursuing a persistent bourgeois democratic agenda and the positions of the organisations of big capital over “democratic solution” do not completely coincide.

For left liberals the struggle for political democracy that would result in a bourgeois parliamentary system in Turkey in the model of the West is a very important matter of principle. For big capital, however, implementation of certain “democratisation” packages can become urgent only depending on time and circumstances (mostly with pressure from abroad!). But there is a negative side to be emphasized in left liberals’ attitude as well.

Left liberals distort the consciousness of working masses by preaching overconfidence to the demands of “democratisation” on the part of the organisations of big capital like TÜSİAD. To spread the illusion that democracy could be brought by big capital obscures the fact that workers and the Turkish and Kurdish poor need to fight to achieve a wider democracy. Big capital, on the other hand, acting on its own class interests by its nature, makes its way without paying so much attention to what left liberals say.

Problems such as the liquidation of the military tutelage regime and democratisation of Turkish political landscape have become items on the agenda of big capital in connection with its drive for going international and economic exigencies. Likewise, to find a solution to the Kurdish question and Cyprus question has become the agenda of the big capital due to the factors like Turkey’s drive to join the EU or undertake new missions in the Middle East in

collaboration with the USA .

But successive bourgeois coalition governments before the general elections of 2002 did not solve these problems. Actually they turned these problems into deadlocks in many respects. And these problems, aggravated as they are, again came out as problems on the table to be solved by AKP which came to power single-handedly after 2002 elections with promises to bring a solution. The first and second terms of AKP governments seem to constitute a new period in which these problems have started to be solved.

However, as we explained above, the relationship between economy and politics in Turkey has peculiar aspects in comparison to the Western countries. As explained by the course of historical development a military tutelage system based on the military and civil bureaucracy has taken shape in this land and continued its influence. As a consequence of this situation the military-guided bourgeois political landscape in Turkey , unlike the Western capitalist countries, has created peculiar redlines and points of resistance incompatible with the exigencies of the economy.

The general rule is undoubtedly is that economic base and economic needs are in the final analysis decisive. However to break the traditional political crust in Turkey and establish a new political landscape compatible with the global economy comes about in an extremely belated, troubled and conflicted way. We can summarise the developments along this way in a few points as conclusion.

First, although these economic motives put a strong stamp over the last period of Turkey the tension in the political sphere is still going on. Although the party that stands for the military tutelage regime is objectively losing ground, the political infighting between them and the liberal forces that stand for demilitarisation has not been decisively concluded yet.

Second, given Turkey 's realities, it is not a bad but a good thing that there are political forces standing for bourgeois democracy such as left liberals etc. in the political arena, although they do not ultimately go beyond the bourgeois frame.

Third, it is a positive step in this land to demand a normalisation, in a bourgeois sense, of the political landscape which has been for many years under direct command or indirect shadow of military tutelage regime. But that left

liberals present it in an exaggerated way by, for instance, speaking of “civil revolution”, “democracy revolution” etc., should not be tolerated.

Forth, while such a change is a positive thing, given the realities of Turkey, it should not be forgotten that it is extremely belated. In a world where capitalism is rocked by crises and thus even the framework of traditional bourgeois democracies is narrowed, it is extremely dangerous to create an illusion of “bourgeois democracy” to work smoothly.

Fifth, and last, the “democratisation” brought forward onto the agenda of Turkey and demanded from the government of AKP takes its motivation, including the position of left liberals, largely from big capital’s need for going global. Yet what is needed today is a kind of struggle for democracy which takes its *raison d’être*, its legitimacy and strength from the revolutionary struggle of the working class, toiling masses and Kurdish poor... Moreover, as we try to emphasize in every occasion, regardless of the kind or content, only those gains achieved and protected through organised struggle can be lasting!